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Manzanita Earrings and Wide Pebble Bold Ring – Blackened Steel, White Gold and White Diamonds Photo – William Dobbs

FROM THE EDITOR

SUZANNE RAMLJAK

One of the paradoxes of the visual arts is that they rely on superficial appeal to convey profound ideas. Beauty may indeed be skin-deep, as the maxim goes, but good art enlists alluring surface effects in the service of greater understanding. The artists featured in this issue of *Metalsmith* all create visually enticing works that ultimately grant us a deeper appreciation of life's complexity.

Dee Fontans's artistic endeavor encompasses jewelry, costume, and live performance. Presented under the title, "Outing the Body," Fontans's work aims to reassert the value of the mature female persona, bringing "real" women out of the closet of media neglect and distortion. Her attention-getting strategy involves mimicking popular entertainment, such as music videos and high fashion, in order to subvert their very conventions. As Amy Gogarty comments, "In this way, [Fontans's] performances function as ornament—attracting the gaze of the viewer in order to redirect it toward a greater meaning."

The complexly patterned surfaces of David Secrest's work dazzle the eye with their play of interlocking forms. Such optical stimuli are rooted in Secrest's deep understanding of science and mathematics. From fractal geometry to the physics of soap bubbles, Secrest is fascinated with the underlying structure of matter. More that just formal exercises, his works cultivate our appreciation of the hidden dimensions of all things.

Sandra Enterline (on our cover) produces quietly elegant jewelry that seems at first to thwart further speculation. But beneath their aloof facades, her works harbor mystery and import. Enterline's recent pieces include small metal screens, behind which shimmer and gleam radiant materials like rubies or shells. Her work beautifully expresses the truth that what is hidden is often more powerful than what is seen...

SR

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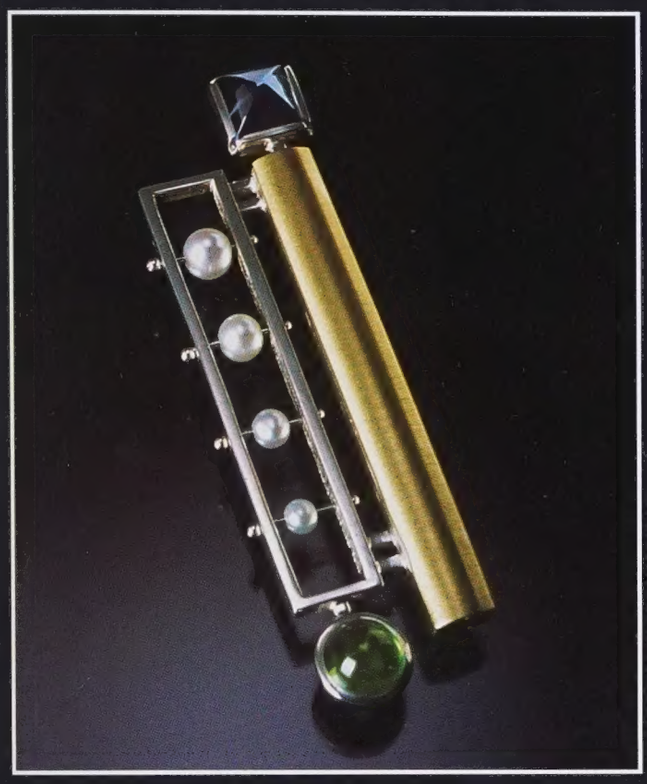

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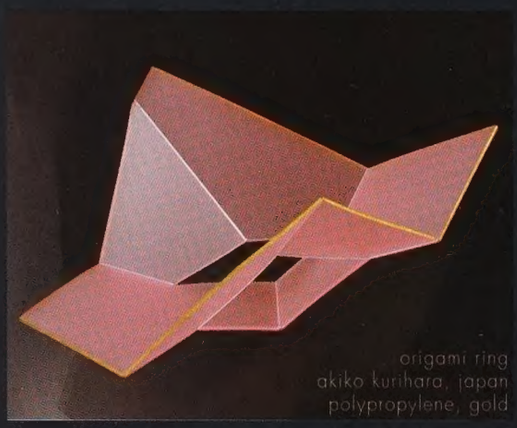

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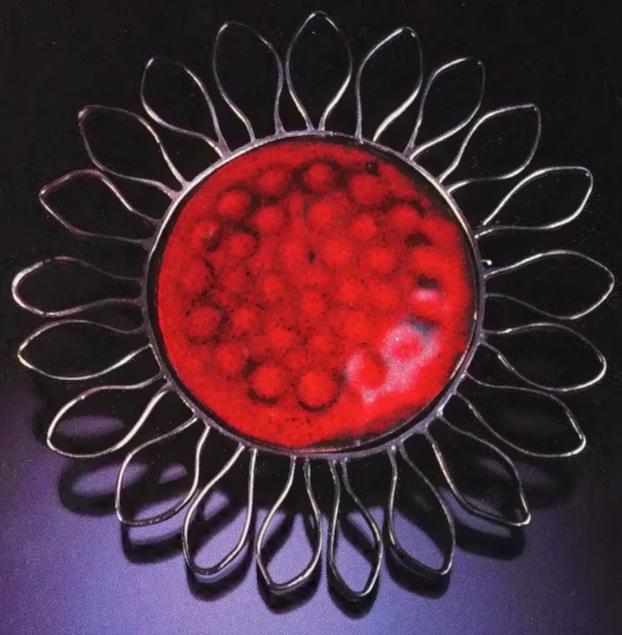

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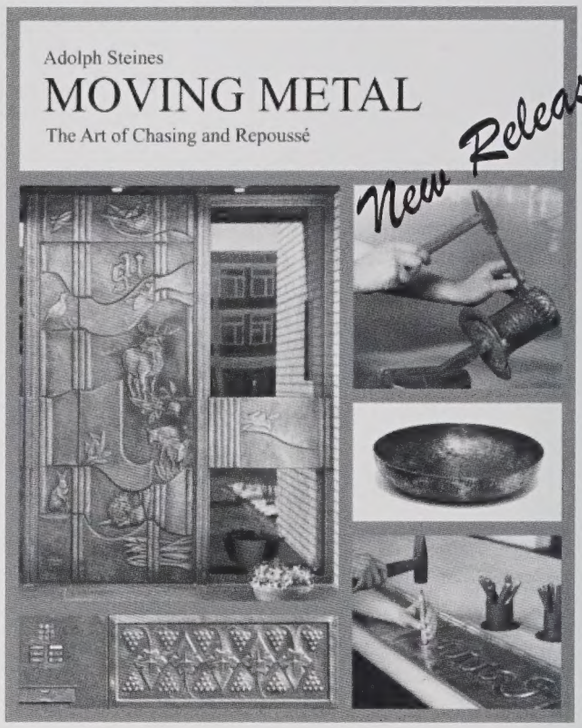

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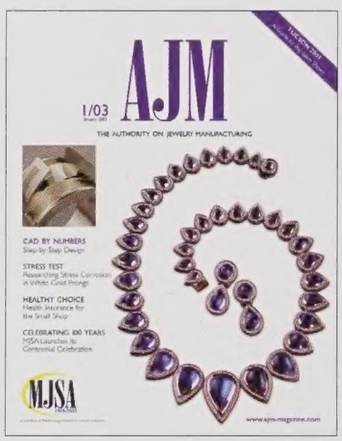

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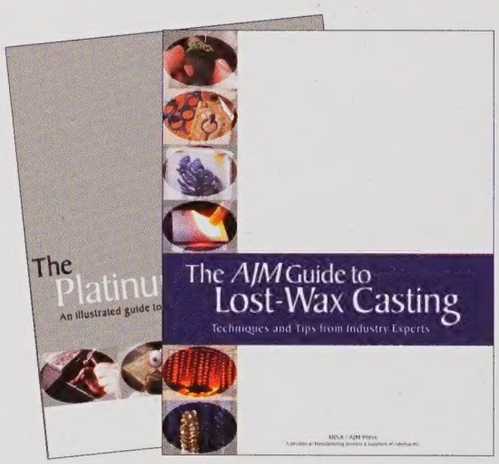

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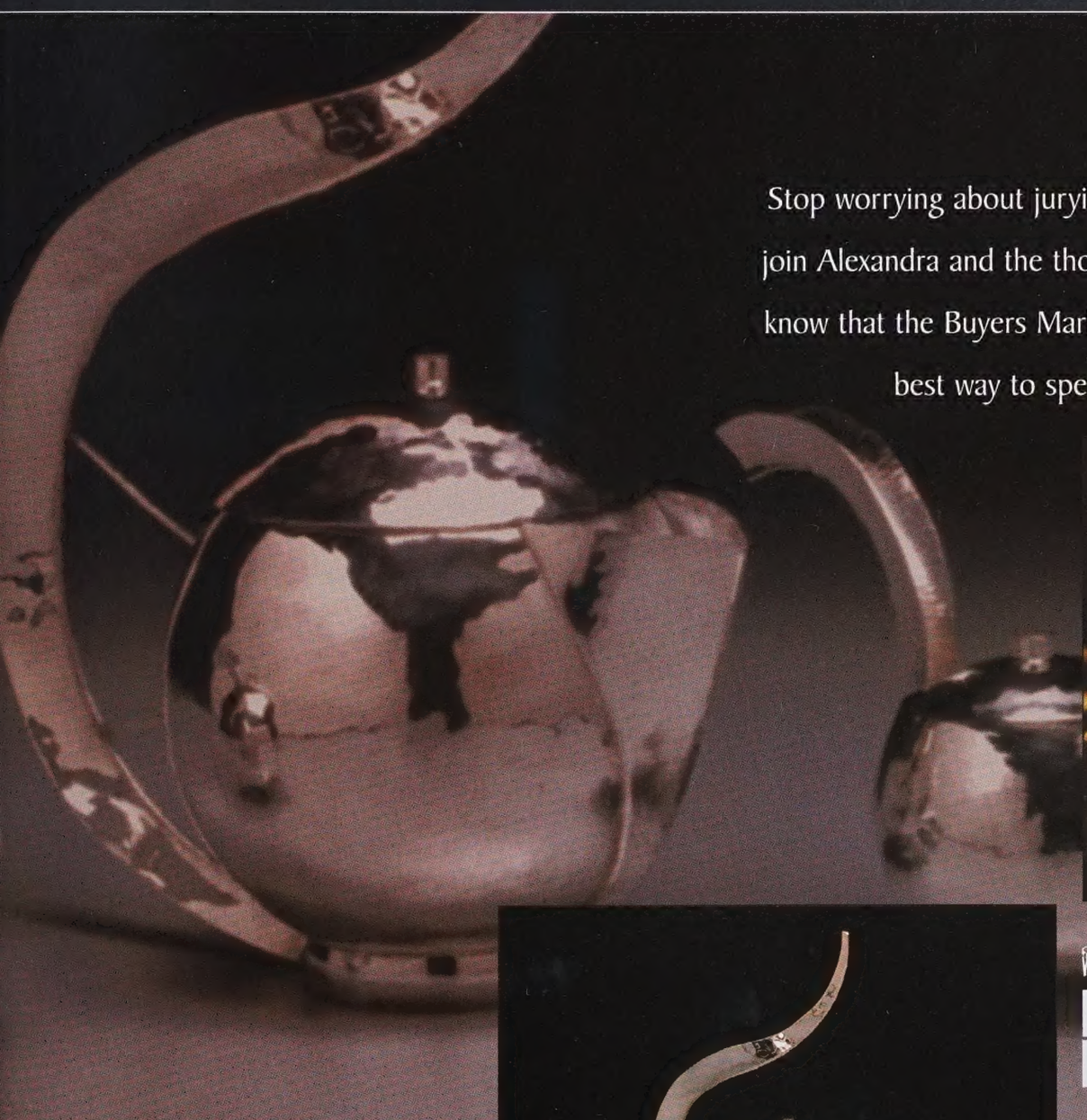

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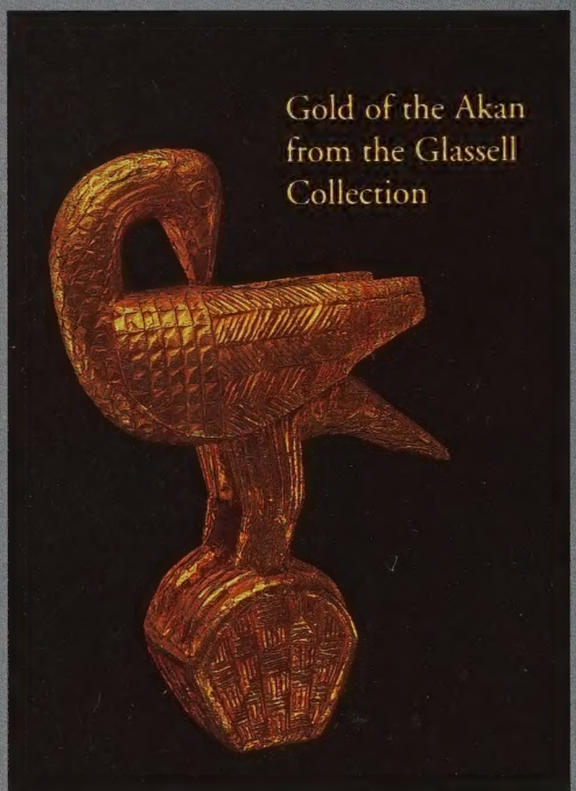
BOOKS

Gold of the Akan from the Glassell Collection

by Doran H. Ross, with contributions by Frances Marzio

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2002

by Marjorie Simon



Gold of the Akan documents the more than 900 African artworks collected by Alfred C. Glassell, Jr., captain of industry (petroleum) and philanthropist of the mid-twentieth century. The Akan constitute one of the largest ethnic groups in Ghana, a country of forested coastal plains tucked under the westward wing of Africa's land mass, bordered by the Cote d'Ivoire to the west, Burkino Faso to the North, Togo to the east, and the Atlantic Ocean to the south. The explanatory text by Doran H. Ross, former director of the Fowler Museum at UCLA, who has written extensively on African material culture, sticks to ethnography and does a good job of reporting on the cultural context of the objects in the collection. *Gold of the Akan* nicely complements Timothy F. Garrard's *Gold of Africa*, from the 1989 exhibition of the same name at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, which does a much better job of informing readers how the objects are made. Ross's African photographs act as participant observers for readers, being clear and illustrative without appearing voyeuristic. Houston MFA staff photographer Thomas R. DuBrock provides studio photographs.

Writing for the intelligent lay reader, Ross explains the function and symbolism of items of royal regalia. Not all the objects are actually made of gold; many are wood covered with gold leaf. And the gold objects do not date to antiquity, as gold was valued mostly by European traders and colonials beginning with the Portuguese in the fifteenth century and exploding in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, contemporaneous with the burgeoning slave trade and demand for gold bullion in the west. But, like other African cultures, the Akan proved to have an affinity for gold.

The story of the Akan peoples, their mores and values, are embedded in the objects through an unusual combination of verbal and visual associations, namely the pictorial representation of proverbs. As Ross introduces each item of regalia, a picture begins to emerge of the chief, his court, and the things that are important to them and to the community.

The most famous and important item is the stool, which symbolizes and embodies the entire state, and also serves as "the locus of Akan ancestor veneration." At the summit is the Golden Stool, which is never sat upon, but "rests on its side on its own chair, which in turn sits on an elephant skin, [and] the whole ensemble is placed under two designated umbrellas."

Photographs and text document the range and boundaries of stool design: "Akan stools are typically carved from a single block of wood. They have a rectangular base, and a seat that curves upward on both sides supported by four struts and a central column.... Stool supports include a number of abstract and geometric structures that make reference to such object types as locks, amulets, and draughts [game] boards, as well as more clearly representational images of crocodiles, leopards, and elephants."

Ross explains why the variety of animals is significant. Akan imagery is omnivorous, and the design of staffs, swords, and sword handles comes from many sources, not all indigenous. Lions, for example, are actually rare on the coast of Africa, but lions figure prominently in English, Danish, and Dutch heraldry. Consequently, lions on Akan sword ornaments are positioned not naturalistically, but in

a stylized profile like that on a heraldic shield. Sword ornaments also appear in the shapes of teapots and sugar bowls, cannons and gunpowder.

The handles of large-bladed, unsheathed swords embody proverbs too. For example, a hand holding a snake means "When you hold the head of a snake the rest is nothing but a rope." But the implied meaning was conveyed in English as a war maxim: "If you capture your enemies' weapons, they are defeated; if you capture your enemies' chief they are defeated." The proverbs often have more than one meaning, having been updated from antiquity to include colonial references.

The chief's counsel, or *okyeame*, carries an elaborately carved wooden staff capped with an equally elaborate finial of gold or silver leaf, the latter deriving from nineteenth-century European style sticks. Like the other kinds of visual/verbal communication, staff carvings symbolize proverbs such as the familiar "Birds of the same species roost in the same tree." Other motifs have to do with power, or illustrate desirable behaviors or messages for citizens. For example, one finial shows a man helping another climb a tree ("If you climb a good tree, you get a push"), and another, four heads ("One head does not go into counsel").

African gold jewelry has been well documented for several hundred years, but there is much here that is new, including many fine examples of gold copies of Victorian jewelry such as watch-face bracelets and chains. The most common royal jewelry are necklaces "consisting of a diverse assortment of gold and sometimes glass beads typically strung in apparently random order," and gold versions of necklaces usually made of wood, bone, ivory, or shell. "Charms" are likely to have been fabricated in beeswax and cast in gold, and appear to be filigree or incised versions of prevalent symbols such as mudfish, teeth, seeds, crabs, and even books, as well as the more familiar barrel and disk beads. Contact with Europeans has resulted in charms in the shape of keys, coins, clocks, and locks, as well as Masonic and Muslim-inspired symbols. Large cast gold rings in the shape of mudfish, scorpions, frogs, crocodiles, tortoises, porcupines, and other indigenous animals are likewise encoded: "Fish out of water dies, king without followers ceases to exist."

An intriguing development revealed in an essay by Frances Marzio is the adaptation of Victorian jewelry designs by Akan goldsmiths at the end of the nineteenth century. The visiting British gave jewelry as gifts and the Akan continued the practice among themselves. Evidently Queen Victoria herself was "a major presence among the Akan" and the jewelry, which included necklaces, rings, bracelets, hairpins, earrings, and watches, was rendered completely in gold, including the placement of gems and watch hands. Occasionally cuttlefish castings were taken of small objects. Examples of pages from British jewelry catalogues are shown with their Akan counterparts, as well as Akan women wearing wigs heavily adorned with Victorian hair ornaments. There is a curious sympathy between Victorian jewelry themes and Akan mores. "Victorian jewelry entailed elaborate verbal/visual associations of its own" with symbols that were understood by the makers and wearers. For example, "forget-me-nots symbolized true love and roses connoted beauty.... Sheaves of wheat indicated abundance and continuity." Other Victorian themes such as nature (insects and birds) and heraldic symbols (lions and shields) were also adapted.

Having described the individual objects and their many levels of meaning, Ross concludes with a description of the lavish festivals at which the regalia is displayed, proclaiming "the wealth of the state, the power of the chief, and the honor and continuity of the ancestors." The reader, now familiar with the symbols and their attendant proverbs, recognizes the staffs, fly whisks, the chief's court, their jewelry and umbrellas. The crowned chief, wrapped in his kente cloth, sitting regally with his legs uncrossed, holding his staff, with his gold bracelets, armlets and rings of mudfish and stars, his sandals, his bearers and their regalia, has become much more than an exotic photograph.

As a resource for jewelers, *Gold of the Akan* is neither as useful as Garrard's *Gold of Africa*, nor as luscious as Angela Fisher's *Africa Adorned*. Descriptions and interpretations of images are located within the oral tradition of the region and its people. Although materials are identified, processes are not. Are objects cast in sand? Who in the society are the makers? How are the skills taught and by whom? It is unclear whether this omission reflects a Western bias, unconscious stereotyping, or authorial intent. The political implications of Glassell's acquisitions are not explored, although the contributions of many Ghanaians are acknowledged. The book is, however, a readable and informative ethnography documenting one man's obsession. It is a valuable text to accompany or commemorate a visit to the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, which now, with the jewelry collection of Helen Drutt English, offers a global treasure trove of objects of ornament and meaning, made by hand. ⧗

Marjorie Simon is a metalsmith and writer based in New Jersey.

OPINION

Success in Context

by Boris Bally

Boris Bally in his studio leaping with joy over a new 5 x 16' worktable, 2003.
Photo: Curtis Aric

It has taken me almost 30 years of working as a metalsmith to begin pondering the meaning of the road I have chosen and its impact on my life. Maybe it is fatherhood that has forced me to ask these questions now. Or maybe it is my graying hair? Eventually, I will want my children to feel successful. And I want them to be proud of me. Life is a gift and for some this is success enough. As comedian Steven Wright tells us, "You can't have everything; where would you put it?"

A metalsmith's lifestyle is such an unpredictable, unconventional, and innovative one. How can we define success and how do we even realize when we have made it? Somewhere there must be a mysterious list of flaming career hoops that we learn to jump through, eventually mastering these tricks while hoping to remain untarnished by the time we finally earn status. No, the journey must culminate in a series of doors that miraculously open after a predetermined period of hustling. In fact, the key appears to be living with an eye to equilibrium: balancing life with the making of art. It also involves the momentum of a slowly growing inner strength developing along with an artist's commitment, passion, and hard work. A critical mass is reached when head, heart, hands, and chutzpah mix to create a rich stew, well-seasoned with the proper education, experience, environment, skill, persistence, daring, and, of course, pinches of luck.

So what are our own definitions of success then? It seems so cliché to say that the more we have done, the more there is left to do; the more we learn, the more is left to know; the bolder we become, the more inner fear surfaces. Obviously, success has something to do with balancing such extremes. I set out to find out how other metalsmiths felt about this topic, and specifically how

they defined "success" in their own personal terms. I solicited metalsmiths from a wide variety of backgrounds to address the subject. Some of them are young and some more experienced; all are outstanding members of either our academic, artistic, or business communities. While many of their views conflict, most of them are astonishingly similar.

In the opinion of industrial artist Ries Niemi, who makes large-scale, big-budget work in an enormous shop adjoining his home in Bow, Washington, the real measure of an artist is someone who can't help themselves and simply must make "things." Niemi believes success is irrelevant, "Can you be successful at eating? at breathing?" he asks, echoing the views of many of the metalsmiths I polled. Success is being able to continue doing artwork while making enough money to support ourselves, continually learning new things and challenging boundaries. As with many of us, the changes in Niemi's life have mostly been self-initiated, his life evolves by following his interests. He explains, "I get interested in something, figure out some way to sell it so I can buy tools and materials, learn more, and make more."

A more psychological perspective comes from Johanna Dahm, artist and professor at the University of Applied Sciences in Pforzheim, Germany, who lives and works in Zürich, Switzerland. Dahm suggests that success is something the insatiable ego chases. The ego feels satisfied only in short moments when it has been able to succeed while competing with others or oneself. Therefore, there is always a loser left behind, the next loser inevitably in sight. But the ego, which lives for the fascination of the moment or for the creative pause, has no time for charm and should not be trusted.

Dahm also suggests that every society has a few outstanding thinkers whose brilliant contributions did not happen because they wanted to feel successful. Rather, an excellent idea kept them restless. This idea had the luck to be accompanied by the right mind and soul at the right moment and place. If an idea is weak, no strategy or tactic will do the job. More love will not help either, as good ideas can be chased away with too much.

Keith Lewis, associate professor of art at Central Washington University in Ellensburg, is also suspicious of commercial viability as a measure of success. He believes that true art requires investigation and doesn't yield instant satisfaction. Because the image reaches far more people than the object can, success has also meant seeing his work published, for if the work is shown, it gives people something, positive or negative, to talk about. "Often missing from our field, is seeing one's work vigorously critiqued through provocative writing or engaging theory," Lewis claims. "The fine arts have benefited from often brutal critical discourse and so would we."

With an interesting networking metaphor, James Thurman, associate director and assistant professor at the School of Visual Arts, Penn State University, thinks of his involvement with the arts as a stone thrown into a lake. "I am only at the surface of the water for an instant, but that instant creates new ripples that spread and intersect with other waves and ripples, to create something new. In the process I try to make a splash whose effect spreads as much as possible. Maybe if we approach it just right and our apex is not too steep, we can skip along the surface, producing numerous other origins of ripples." Thurman wrestles with two very different ideas of success, which can be in opposition yet sometimes strongly reinforce one another. The philosophical, "loving what you are doing and being present and aware in each moment," and the professional, "being gauged by financial achievement, personal recognition and reputation." It seems that the more these ideas can be in alignment, the more you will be happy and satisfied with your life.

Phil Carrizzi, assistant professor and chair of the Metal/Design Department at Kendall College of Art & Design in Grand Rapids, believes success is attaining an equilibrium between living and interpreting life through his work. His formula is whimsical, "My success quotient is measured by squaring the average hours of sleep I get per night and subtracting the number of jabs my wife takes at me for being so absent at home, where my age is more or less the maximum integer."

Although it is a highly personal, often difficult path to "success," it is remarkable how optimistic we seem to be as a group. Most of us wouldn't change a thing or have done anything differently in our lives or careers. We can't imagine doing anything else save devoting additional time to travel or family, often hoping this will lead to further inspiration. We do not welcome retirement, at least in conservative terms. By becoming more selective and learning how to budget our time better, we strive for more opportunites to create personal work, always hoping to improve and explore. We feel fortunate and positive. Our biggest aspirations seem to be health, happiness, and stability, although there also seems to be a common desire to be remembered, to achieve immortality through the fruits of our labors. ⧗

Boris Bally is a metalsmith, junksmith, and designer living in Providence, RI. This article is based on his presentation at SNAG's 2003 conference in San Francisco.

VIEW

Western Perspective

by Chris Ramsay

The post-Civil War West—the era of Longhorn cattle and mustang cowponies, the open range, the long drives—gave the world an unforgettable folk hero, the cowboy. His basic needs were few and he used whatever was available during the early period of the long drives: bits and spurs, rope, hats and cavalry boots, remnants of Confederate uniforms, homespun shirts, and Mexican saddles. In the next few decades, as local artisans and distant factories labored to meet the fast-growing demand, cowboy dress and gear became more standardized.

Bits and spurs, like boots and saddles, were mainly handmade in ranching centers. Cowboys were especially particular about their gear and took pride in buying the best equipment they could afford. Blacksmiths generally started making bits and spurs as a favor to local cowboys. Those who were the most skillful were usually swamped with orders, and what started as a sideline became their mainstay. Spur and bit makers were individualistic craftsmen, developing their own stylistic trademarks. The makers were locally or regionally famous during their active careers, but today many are only remembered by collectors, who admire their skill but know little of their lives.

The Traditional Cowboy Arts Association (TCAA) was formed in 1998 with the goal of celebrating and perpetuating the work of such artisans, who have dedicated themselves to achieving excellence in the cowboy crafts. The TCAA promotes the traditions of the North American cowboy through an association of the finest gearmakers in the disciplines of silversmithing, saddlemaking, rawhide braiding, and the making of bits and spurs.

For the past five years the association has presented an exhibition and sale of members' works at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City. The 2003 exhibition consisted of exquisite silver work, the finest saddles, bits, spurs, and braided rawhide gear by 14 craftspeople. Each work demonstrated the masterful skill of the craftsman and his creative freedom to manipulate techniques within the confines of tradition. With function as the underlying foundation, heirloom-quality pieces have become valued possessions of serious horsemen as well as collectors.

Viewing these objects with no working knowledge of their function, I was nonetheless seduced by the intriguing forms and passionate swirls of western-style surface ornamentation. The mastery of techniques in each work was awe-inspiring and created with obvious respect for the traditions of the past, while introducing new ideas to the historical forms. The overlay of firearms engraving and traditional inlay techniques with exquisite detail applied to the bits and spurs made by Ernie Marsh represents a fine example of the cross-pollination that has occurred within the cowboy heritage.

Silversmith Scott Hardy from Longview, Alberta, Canada provides insight into the maker and his craft: "Embellishing horse and rider with precious metals is a tradition as old as man on horseback...crossing tribal and cultural boundaries, silver and gold trappings have expressed the pride of horsemen throughout the millennia. The image of the cowboy still stirs our ideals of independence, integrity and freedom, while appreciation of things well-made, by hand, flourishes in the age of mass production and mediocrity." ⧗

All quotes from the 2003 Traditional Cowboy Arts Association Exhibition catalogue.

Chris Ramsay is a metalsmith and professor of metals and jewelry at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater.

clockwise from opposite page, bottom
Mark Dahl
Spurs, 2003
steel, sterling silver inlay
Photo: Ed Muno

Scott Hardy
Buckle Set, 2003
sterling silver, 14k and 18k yellow, green, and red gold, diamonds
Photo: William D. Clark

Steve Mecum
Saddle, 2003
hand-carved leather with sterling silver inserts by David Alderson
Photo: Ed Muno

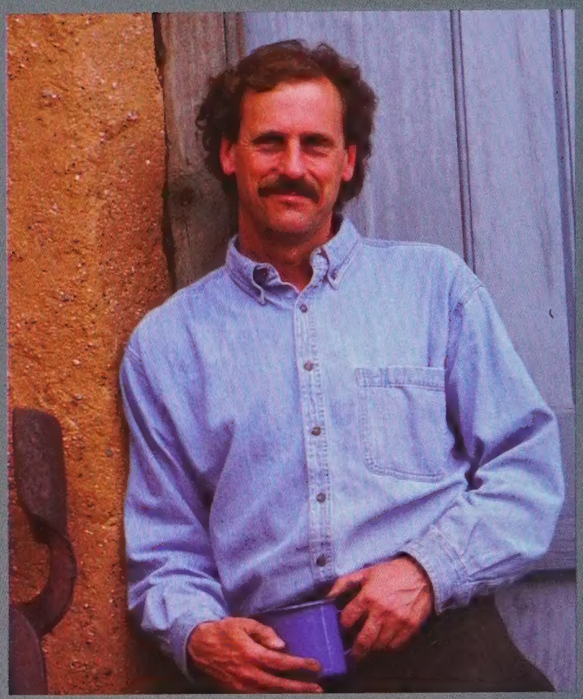
John C. Ennis
Spurs, 2003
steel
Photo: Ed Muno

Ernie Marsh
Bit, 2003
sterling and fine silver
Photo: Ed Muno

STUDIO VISIT

Tom Joyce

by Ellen Berkovitch



Brown trunks of beetle-decimated piñon trees crowd the landscape on the way to Tom Joyce's Santa Fe studio. This endangered species imparts a poignant note to my visit. The blacksmith has engaged a longtime physical and intellectual dialogue with the extinction of virgin iron and the perpetuation of its 3000-year-old living history. It may be pathetic fallacy, but I notice that the reddish brown hue of once-verdant hills approximates the color of iron oxide. Along the gravel path to Joyce's studio one lone tree thrives. Its caretaker is inside. His studio office teems with the evidence of an artist's habitat. Here are African hoe and spear currencies, dance rattles, anklets, forged fireplace tools, a prototype section of a gate, Tibetan document seals. A skinny oil-on-panel painting shows a hand striking an anvil with a hammer. A bookshelf includes technical, archival titles: a 1939 *Metals Handbook*, and New Mexico arcania such as *Firearms, Traps and Tools of the Mountain Men*.

Arrayed on a studio table are photographs Joyce's elder daughter, Kate, a photojournalist studying at Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies, made of her father at work. They are black-and-white compositions, at once intense and concentrated, like their subject.

Joyce is catching up on paperwork. There's a lot of it, including a pile of congratulatory notes expressing the unrestrained excitement of both Santa Fe and the international metals community at the news Joyce won a MacArthur Foundation fellowship. "Please," he tells me with a slightly rueful smile, "do everything you can to avoid calling it a 'genius grant.'" For although that's exactly what everybody does call the five-year, $500,000 foundation award that comes with no strings attached, Joyce, reached by phone with the news, reportedly was so shocked he replied with the disclaimer, "But I'm a blacksmith!"

Indeed. The anvil anchors his studio. Rows of hammers and tools along one long wall communicate with the storage of rolling stock on another. Hung from the ceiling, a forged iron spike pierces a fluted-edge tome of newspaper. That is a Joyce sculpture, exploring the confluence of the long-lived and the temporal. Two Piranesi prints of Roman ruins appear to have taken on the aura of the studio—ash and patina being by-products both of the particular and the universal realm of ideas Joyce mines at the anvil.

Today the studio seems unusually quiet compared to past episodes of frenzied boraxing I've witnessed here. Joyce, who said he considers the timing of the MacArthur "really uncanny," is working solo now to finish up architectural commissions before March. That will mark the start of one of two ongoing priorities the MacArthur grant will allow him: Joyce will travel to about 15 countries in Africa to deepen his research into those cultures "where smiths are still deemed indispensable." He also will work on large sculptural projects that the grant will help to fund.

Joyce has set cubic forms on a table, next to walnut-sized chunks of iron-rich material called septarium nodules (fossilized algae) he picked up on hikes in the Galisteo basin. Just a glance expresses that something very new is here. The cubes are yellow, resined sand casts. Casts? Yes.

In 2002 the artist spent four months in residence in Wisconsin, casting iron at Kohler Arts/Industry Program's factory. The unspoken line "But I'm a blacksmith!" fairly echoes in the room. "Casting is, in large measure, a

blacksmith's nemesis," says Joyce. A blacksmith makes singular objects; a casting nets multiples intended to be uniform—like bathtubs. But look at Joyce's cubes and you see immediately elements—call them essences—that link the new work to Joyce's old expositions of proportional geometries in iron. At the anvil he has worked with concepts of fold and allowed that formal notion literally to expand under the conditions of heat and pressure.

Now Joyce's hands trace the sectioned prismatic lines he scored along the resined sand cube. He explains his casting established positive and negative casts—diagonal pairings of two sections each of cube which, respectively, represented the "positive of absence" and "negative of presence" in iron. "My interest in these pieces was the formal dissected geometry of the cube being reassembled and breached by migrating iron that formed a webbed interior," he says. Back to the septarium nodule. Customary for Joyce, the casting process married artistic and empirical experiment. As the iron leached, miming in 2002 the mineral formation in the antique nodule, the process spoke to chemistry as well as aesthetics. The leached iron strands look fragile, almost tentative, like veins connecting the outside to the invisible interior of the metal.

On the next table a set of very red shapes speak to iron oxide's indubitable relationship to blood. Joyce was in New York on September 11, 2001. His daughters, Kate and Irene, had arrived by separate planes that morning, for an opening of his work scheduled for September 12 at the American Craft Museum. Kate got off the plane that crashed in the field in Pennsylvania later. Julie Joyce, Tom's wife, was at home in New Mexico.

Joyce designed this piece in New York on September 12, and cast it as a one-year remembrance gift for his family and several friends bereaved in the catastrophe. He asks me to sit down. He places one of the red shapes in my hands, and I am overcome. I am also awash, as seems inevitable in Joyce's presence, with associative combinations: the baptismal font, Brancusi's newborn heads, the fontanel of the skull, the crescent of two football arcs off-set and striving for Cubist expression.

Joyce takes a piece of chalk and like a modern Leonardo da Vinci marks the vesica form on the floor. He begins with a point: one seed of poised unity that centers a circle, and generates another, aleph expanding into two. Squaring the circle derives the golden section. From the twin rings of the infinity symbol, the crescent-like vesica sections another unity: a meeting point joining representations of holiness in Christian iconography to the patterned godhead in Muslim religion. The form, representing vulva for Christians, was for the Islamists a central motif in a culture that proscribed actual depiction of the sacred.

Joyce also created the alloy he used to cast the object. It consists of iron, ash from the World Trade Center site, sand from a mandala Tibetan monks created in Santa Fe, and dirt from the Santuario de Chimayo, a church in New Mexico renowned for its healing powers. Joyce was interested in the monks' admonition that mandala witnesses take the sand back to water, for iron preserves water in its interior. He ignites his torch and flames the sculpture so that it visibly reveals wet spots. "It's time release for the next millenium," Joyce says, smiling. ⧗

Ellen Berkovitch is a writer based in Santa Fe.

clockwise from lower left, opposite page
Skewed Vesica: Ash to Ash, 2002
cast iron, ash, sand, soil
largest: 8 x 9 1/2 x 8"
Photo courtesy John Michael Kohler Arts Center: Arts/Industry Program

Tom Joyce standing at the entrance to his Santa Fe studio, 2003
Photo: Kathy de la Torre, courtesy *The Santa Fe New Mexican*

View of forging area in Tom Joyce's workshop, 2003
Photo: Michael Long

Pendent, 2003
silver, 22k gold, ammolite, citrine, amber
length 18"
Photo: Charles Lewton-Brain

Dee Fontans

Performing Ornament

by Amy Gogarty

Individual careers of artists often take surprising turns. Accidents or chance meetings may set an artist on an unexpected yet fruitful path. The popular stereotype of the artist is still based on the patriarchal, modernist *Künstlerroman*: the young (male) artist turns away from the philistine world to pursue his individual genius. His goal-oriented career unfolds in a linear and progressive fashion. However, as we know from direct experience of successful artists, reality rarely mirrors myth, and we are the richer for that.

Real artists reflect upon the events of their lives and the complexity of their social milieu; they often profit from obstacles placed in their way by chance. One such artist is Dee Fontans, for whom a potentially career-breaking accident opened up a completely new and productive direction.

Given her family history, it was perhaps inevitable Fontans would become a metalsmith. Her maternal great-grandfather was a German clockmaker; her grandfather a machinist, and her uncle a sculptor and jeweler, making her the fourth generation to work with metals. On her father's side, her Puerto Rican ancestry provided her with examples of an expressive and exuberant culture. Growing up in New Jersey, she attended painting and life drawing classes in her early twenties, thinking she was destined for a career in fashion design. She studied fashion at Parsons School of Design in New York City, and, while she loved the energy and focus on the body, she found she was too impulsive and expressive to fit into the business model of the fashion world. Fortunately, a course in jewelry at Parsons led her to her real love, jewelry. Jewelry forced her to slow down, to think through process and structure and to develop the patience, discipline, and hand-eye coordination required for its fabrication. She transferred to the metals and jewelry program at SUNY, New Paltz. Here she encountered visiting artists such as Otto Künzli and Kai Chan, who encouraged her to conceptualize her field in the broadest possible way. Fontans credits her education with fostering her flexibility, respect for the traditions of jewelry making, appreciation of community, and trust in the creative process.

Primaries Red, Primaries Blue, 1998 (detail)
copper, enamel, 24k gold
Model: Dee Fontans
Photo: Charles Lewton-Brain

In the final year of her program, disaster struck: Fontans caught her right hand in a polishing wheel and broke it. For many, this would be a career-ending accident. At the very least, it would discourage

or disadvantage anyone so strongly invested in hand skills. Not one to be easily stopped, Fontans decided to treat the limitations presented by the accident as an asset. She began to draw, paint and work with rubber, paper, plastic, and whatever processes she could perform using her left hand. This opened an entirely new door to her creative process and demonstrated a truism that would remain with her: limitations motivate us in positive ways, forcing us to become more creative in finding new avenues of thought and action. Limitations, whether conceptual, formal or physical, define what appear to be absolute grounds for containment. However, by probing our limitations, we become more aware of our resources, more respectful of our environment, and more adept at recycling and reusing our own history and experience. In the contemporary understanding of the term, limitations foster ecological awareness of our practice.

Once out of art school, Dee returned to New York City, and found work modeling and producing jewelry props for the theater, an experience that honed skills in choreography and presentation she would use later in her own performances. As an emerging artist, she turned again to the liberating potential of limitations, working with inexpensive, found materials and simple tools to produce dramatic, one-of-a-kind work for shows. In 1988, she moved to Canada with her spouse, fellow metalsmith Charles Lewton-Brain. Since that time, she has been based in Calgary, Alberta, where she teaches at the Alberta College of Art and Design. Working as an educator and jeweler, she is also the dynamo behind an innovative concept fusing jewelry, costume, and live performance called "Outing the Body."

For the past five years, everything Fontans has produced has been presented under the rubric "Outing the Body." She chose her moniker carefully, deliberately courting public attention through a name associated with outing gays and lesbians in homophobic culture. Much as the gay liberation movement has sought to validate gay culture through recuperating and transforming negative stereotypes and derogatory terms such as "queer," Fontans has striven to reclaim the value of the mature female persona and body. In her view, fashion and media culture have done much to disparage and erase images of women other than the pubescent waif. Powerful, sexual, and intelligent women outside of the 16-24 age group, if they appear at all, are often depicted as threatening, embarrassing, or even monstrous in media culture.[1] Much of her work draws on stereotypes of misogynist culture, such as the brash or sexually aggressive older woman, and transforms them into positive—and often humorous—characters. In bringing "real" women out of the closet, her work communicates strongly to other women, encouraging them to give voice to their inner emotional reality and desires.

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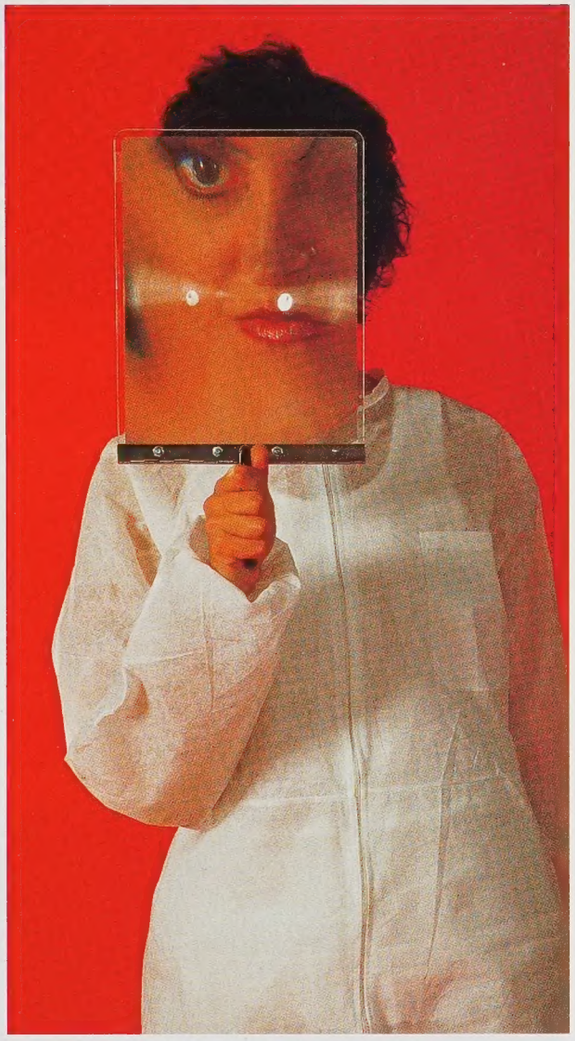
Much like German dadaist Kurt Schwitters, who gathered his writing, sculpture, performance, and even his personal self under the sign of "Merz," Fontans uses the name as a sort of logo. This permits her to combine all aspects of her creative practice, including drawing, painting, jewelry making, collaboration with other artists and performers, and her unique form of public relations and community outreach. The fusion of art and life in all of its manifestations has long been the dream of artists under Modernism, from Dada and Surrealism through Fluxus to contemporary performance artists.[2] Fontans aligns herself with the surrealist tradition of paradox, sexuality, wordplay, and humor.[3] Thankfully, her embrace of populism and the "everyday" eschews the sexism and machismo associated with Surrealism and other avant-garde movements.[4] By gathering all her production under the single concept, she is able to distance herself somewhat from specific works and remain open to a wide variety of influences, as is

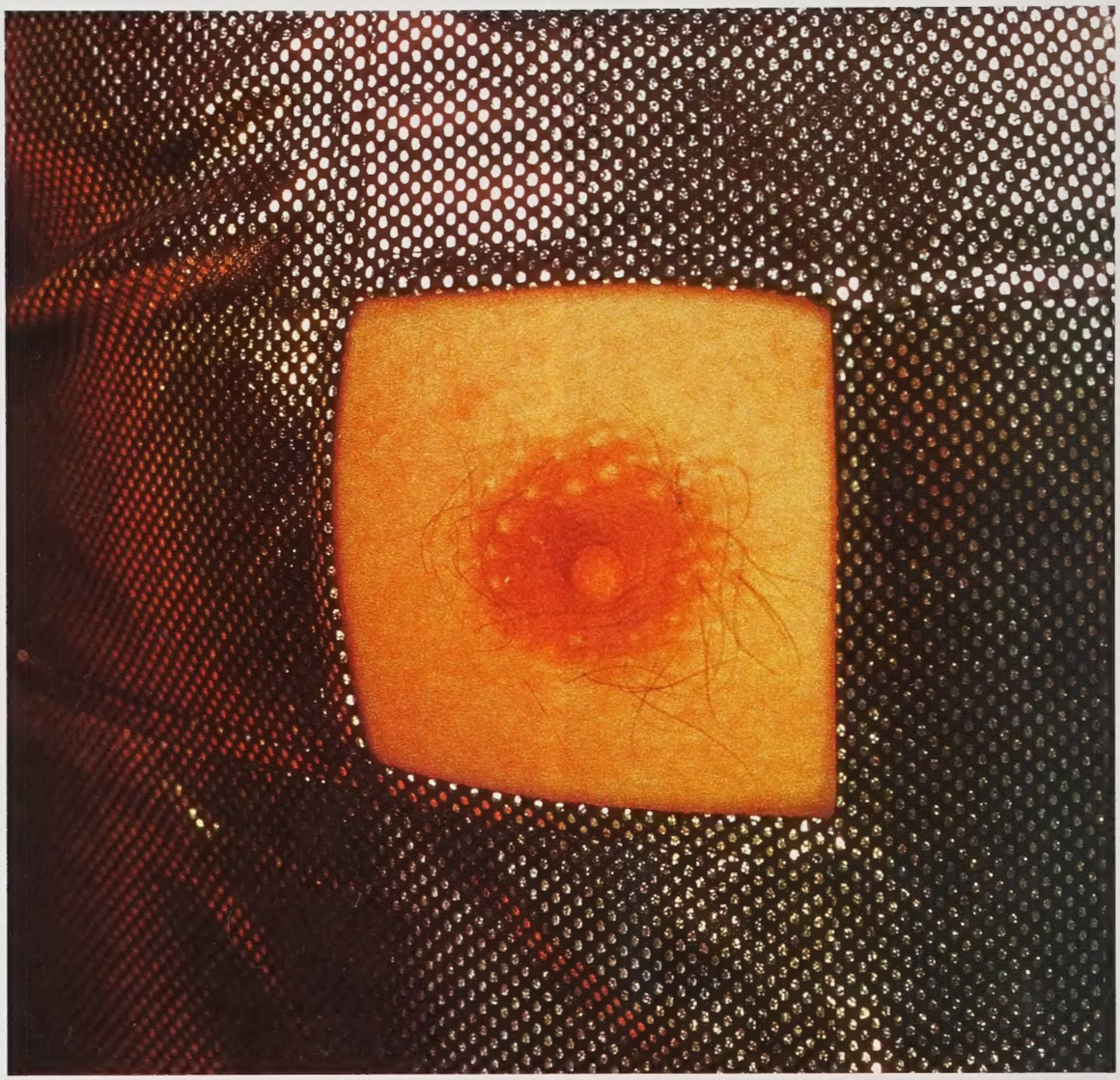
opposite page, clockwise from top left
Bride from performance "Outing The Body–Back By Popular Demand," 2002
plastic garbage bags, lunch bags, duct tape, plastic pearls
Model: Devon Clark
Photo: Cameron H. Diggon

Big Heads, 2002
plastic, paint suit
Model: Colleen Rauscher
Photo: Cameron H. Diggon

Swing Set Dress, 1996
fabric, hula hoop
Model: Dee Fontans
Photo: Jay Robinson

Spring, 1996
fabric, hula hoop
Earth Balls, 1991
fabric, foam, aluminum foil, epoxy resin, 24k gold
Model: Marnie Cooke
Photo: Cameron H. Diggon





Men Abreast, 1999
fabric
Model: Mark Saddler-Brown
Photo: Charles Lewton-Brain

essential for collaborative work. Her overriding concerns are to expand concepts of jewelry from limited notions of precious metals and gems to an all-encompassing embrace of personal, social, and cultural identity, to redefine conventional notions of beauty, and to celebrate the body in all its many forms. She has been strengthened in her convictions regarding jewelry's new role by Robert Ebendorf, an important teacher and mentor, by Otto Künzli, and by Dutch jewelers of the 1960s and 1970s, who used provocative combinations of precious and everyday materials to address conceptual and social issues.

Fontans discovered in Canada that cultural identity was negotiated differently there than it was in the United States. Growing up in the U.S., she felt compelled to disguise or downplay her Puerto Rican identity in a culture more geared towards privileging the selected few. In Canada, this same identity was an asset and resource from which she could work. Support for multiculturalism and diversity—in age, race, gender, and sexual orientation—forms a significant component of Canadian public policy, and it has more general acceptance across the country as a cultural norm. For Fontans, the personal truly is political. Her choice of heterogeneous materials, personal iconography and performance reflects her deep commitment to, and embrace of, Canada's tolerance and celebration of diversity.

Fontans's expanded concept of jewelry is more properly referred to as ornament, in the sense that it grows out of, is constitutive of, and functions in a complementary relationship to the body and persona of the wearer. Etymologically, the word ornament derives from *ornare*, to fit out, equip or adorn, as in military or temple equipment. Ornament originally conveyed the very notion of the beautiful, yet it functions as it does precisely because it points beyond itself to a greater whole. In "The Ontological Foundation of the Occasional and the Decorative," German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer points to the

two-fold nature of ornament: it functions both to draw the attention of the viewer to itself and to redirect that attention toward the greater context in which the ornament performs.[5] Its meaning is contingent in part on the occasion for which it is intended—its "occasionality"—and its value determined in relationship to its appropriateness to a given context.

Thus ornament functions to prepare the body, to enhance or communicate a more complete image of the self. It also performs as a sort of allure or trap, inserting itself between the private or personal and the public or communal space. It operates in this manner in order to connect the individual to something larger, to focus attention on a meaningful encounter between bearer and observer, maker and user. Under Modernism, fine art insisted on its autonomy and ideal or transcendent meaning, independent of its context or "occasionality." As ornament, jewelry is radically contingent, dependent on occasion; it consummates its purpose and meaning through context, ritual, and performance. For this reason, Fontans's jewelry, hand props, and costumes only achieve their full meaning and import as ornament through performance—either informal and personal or formal and public. Performance provides a context or "occasion" within which their suitability and fitness can be assessed.

As with all of her work, Fontans's on-going and outrageous series of performances are called "Outing the Body." Not surprisingly, they have made her a local *cause célèbre,* and they have done much to raise the profile of contemporary studio jewelry in the community. In her performances, she functions as impresario, choreographer, and *couturière*, but her success rests on her ability to draw others into the energy and originality of her vision. Produced on both open runways and theatre stages, the performances involve sets of dance, music, and movement, which humorously parody traditional fashion shows and chorus lines. For example, *Bride* (2002) features models dressed in white garments made from duct tape, pipe insulation, white garbage bags, clear sandwich bags and imitation pearls. The effect is notably elegant, given the materials involved. Fontans uses duct tape to sculpt colorful, form-fitting dresses, which are modeled directly on the body over a sheath of plastic food wrap. From even a short distance, the material loses its industrial aspect and assumes the appearance of fine leather or vinyl. Matching bracelets and neckpieces accompany the duct tape dresses, completing the ensemble. There is no duplicity in her use of these materials; she makes no attempt to disguise or dissemble their identity. Instead, she surprises us with our own failure to perceive qualities of beauty, strength and versatility in the everyday materials that surround us, and demonstrates that limitations in material value can yield premiums with respect to originality, suitability, and style. Her ornaments attract in order to redirect our attention toward a greater awareness of our complex material and social environment.

Following ideas put forth by Marcel Duchamp, Fontans believes viewers occupy a central role in the production of a work of art.[6] The viewer completes the cycle of representation and creation with his or her own response, analysis, and reception of the work. In order to attract viewers, Fontans uses spectacle, as she feels that the first task facing the artist is to gain the attention of the audience. This is particularly important for artists working in less-recognized media, such as fine art jewelry, and for anyone competing with media saturation and the general state of distraction this creates. She mimics many of the conventions she later gently subverts, those of popular entertainment, music video, and high fashion. Once she has captured her audience and gained their trust she begins to warp, exaggerate, and play with those conventions to bring her message across. In this

Following ideas put forth by Marcel Duchamp, Fontans believes viewers occupy a central role in the production of a work of art. The viewer completes the cycle of representation and creation with his or her own response, analysis, and reception of the work.

way, her performances function as ornament—attracting the gaze of the viewer in order to redirect it toward a greater meaning.

Fontans considers carefully the aesthetic and conceptual implications of materials used to construct her costumes. A series of shirts cut to reveal the nipple in *Men Abreast* (1999) addresses conventional gender roles and male bodies. In this performance, Fontans explores similarities between men and women and the "shared, symbolic meanings of the breast." *Swing Set* (1996) features dancers clad in luminous lycra tubes gyrating to the yodel of a country music singer. Accessories include large beaded necklaces and bracelets formed from aluminum foil, one of Fontans's favorite "alternative" materials. Some costumes incorporate semi-precious gems such as moonstone, sapphire, black onyx, and garnet, which lend glamour and sophistication to their presentation. Ornaments are not always flattering, and they can convey darker themes. *Big Heads* (2002) strikes a somber note as models wearing white paper jumpsuits peer through hand-held Fresnel lenses to interact with one another. The lenses warp and enlarge the models' features, producing an apt metaphor for the often unfortunate and intrusive intervention of egos and self-images into human relationships.

Photography plays an important role in Fontans's presentation of her work to the public. Not only does the artist videotape performances for documentation, she projects both still photographs and footage of previous performances as backdrops to stage events. She uses photography to extend rather than compete with her performances, engaging representation on yet another front. Playing off conventional tropes of the fashion industry, she orchestrates photo shoots to showcase her costumes and accessories by providing a context for the work. She circulates these "faux fashion" photographs in the form of postcards or, in exhibitions, as large digital prints. In place of conventional models, Fontans selects mature, full-figured, and multi-raced individuals and invites them to assume playful stances against brightly colored backdrops. The photographs thus embody her commitment to diversity, but they avoid the politically correct look of a "Benetton ad" by asking participants to openly collaborate in the construction of their image. When Fontans herself appears, she obviates cloying narcissism by projecting flamboyancy, playfulness, and zany chic. She wears her colorful wigs, aluminum foil bead necklaces, enameled eyecups, or bold rings with such authority and panache that she encourages others to see fashion and jewelry as liberating, self-expressive, and fun. Her actions take fashion, sexuality, and glamour out of the privileged closet of the few and transform them into life-enhancing pleasure to be enjoyed by all.

While the live events and photographs showcase the jewelry, the pieces also exist as independent works, which have been exhibited across North America. In these installations, individual works become less dependent on occasion and more subject to the accepted norms of gallery presentation. They raise issues of display faced by all craft objects exhibited under conditions developed for visual art, in that sensory and functional qualities

While the live events and photographs showcase the jewelry, the pieces also exist as independent works, which have been exhibited across North America.

Lipstick Container, 2001
silver, garnet, enamel, mirror
1 1/2 x 3"
Photo: Charles Lewton-Brain

are erased through the emphasis on pure visuality. Exhibiting objects with photographs indicating how they might be worn or used partially mitigates this loss, restoring to the imagination some degree of the objects' sensory appeal. In 1998, Fontans was invited to exhibit in Wisconsin on the theme of "Brassiere." Never one to settle on the obvious, she spied aluminum vegetable steamers at a flea market and used them to generate a series of voluptuous *Birthday Bras*. The steamers provide a very functional and wearable base, which she models with characteristic aplomb. They are anodized and embellished with combinations of gold leaf, bezel-set moonstones, and even "whiskers" from a cleaning brush, which poke out in a saucy manner. The garments retain the functional hinge and closure of the original steamer, which means they can also be displayed sculpturally as a closed, spherical form. This series brings together many of Fontans's most important themes: an embrace of the full-figured, mature female body, the recycling and use of alternative materials, combinations of both precious and found materials, glamour, innovation, and humor.

If, for economic reasons, Fontans's early work relied on found materials, and, for conceptual and practical reasons, she continues to use alternative materials, she also enjoys working with fine metals and precious stones. Much of her work for exhibitions and galleries includes gems. Exhibitions provide her with opportunities for taking risks and solving technical and formal problems, including addressing the specifics of limitations. Fontans's expert fabrication skills find expression in the creation of oversized rings and figural pendants. She has developed an interesting "U-shaped" shank for her rings, which gives the appearance of stones floating over the hand, between the fingers. This allows her to set enormous stones,

Canadian Face, 2000
copper, enamel, silver, moonstone
each disc 1 1/2"; length 18 1/2"
Photo: Charles Lewton-Brain

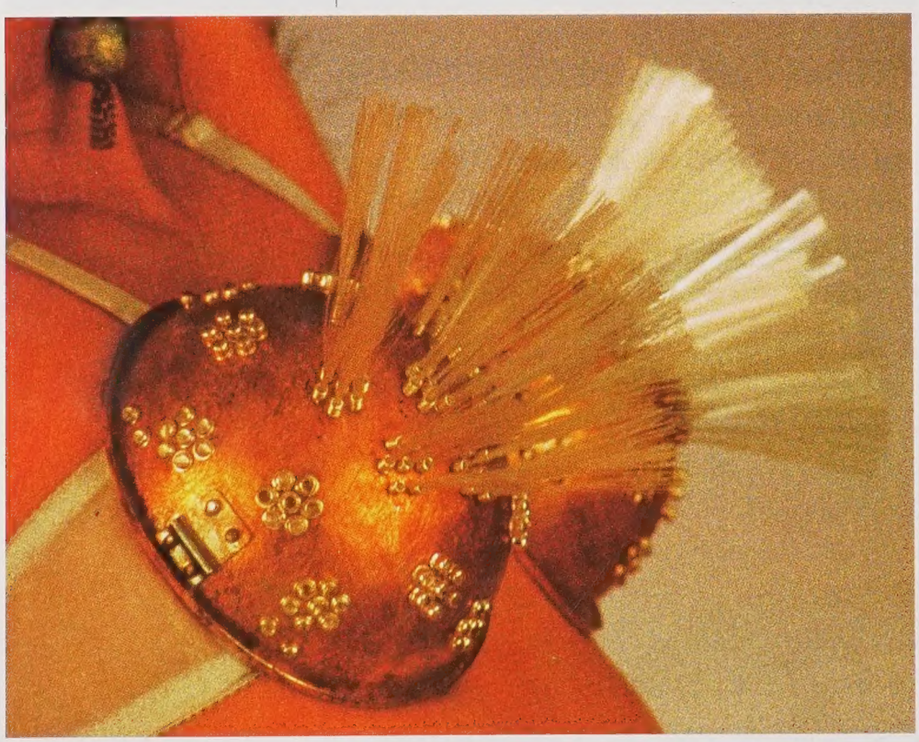
Canadian Face, 2000 (detail)

such as a two-inch rose quartz cabochon, which would be uncomfortable or awkward in a more traditional setting. Another practical and beautiful ring, *Lipstick Container* (2001), encloses lipstick within a sleek silver tube. On the palm side of the hand, a bar slips around two fingers to hold the ring safely in place. Granted, these rings are not every-day wear, but their dramatic boldness contributes to special occasions.

A recent series of pendants extends Fontans's focus on drawing and the figure by combining fine metals, bezel-set stones and strands of semi-precious gem beads. She often uses ammolite, a versatile fossilized shell unique to Alberta. Rock crystal covers a thin shaving of the material, protecting it and enhancing its characteristic fiery flash. Other favorite gems include citrine, tourmaline, amethyst, chrysoprase, and black onyx.

Each pendant comprises three components, suggesting the head, torso, and lower limbs of an expressive, dancing figure, which sits high on its strand of beads at the base of the throat. Fontans brings her training as a painter to the selection of materials. Some combinations employ the effect known as "clash," in which non-adjacent but related hues on the color wheel turn away from each other to produce a powerful sensation. In one, a burnt-orange ammolite is paired with a similarly colored citrine, yet both clash with the deep carmine hue of garnet beads. The effect heightens the pensive quality of this particularly winsome figure, whose silver torso is bound with 22k gold restraints. The silver torso of an ebullient figure emblazoned with citrines and gold spirals dances on a string of taffy-colored amber. A dramatic and assertive figure makes use of discord, an effect the Impressionists used to create vibrating afterimages of "simultaneous contrast." Hues combined out of their natural order, the value of a color in its pure state, create discord. Here, pale lime chrysoprase vibrates visually against the dark mystery of violet amethyst. In each of these works, strong formal qualities combine with craft to create emotive designs.

Rather than focusing on some single-minded goal, her practice is inclusive, circular, and ecological, in the sense that she reinvents and reuses concepts, objects, and materials from her own personal history and immediate environment.



Birthday Bra 40-D, 1999
fabric, aluminum, epoxy resin, fiber optics, silver, moonstone, 24k gold
Model: Dee Fontans
Photo: Stu Swamp

These necklaces make strong statements about the personal identity and taste of the wearer. Wearing these pendants makes one more attentive to one's body stance and movement, as they focus awareness on the particularly sensitive and vital somatic center of the throat. Fontans values wearability and realizes that not many women can wear her more outrageous accessories, such as the *Birthday Bras*. She satisfies those who wish to express themselves through her jewelry by producing more restrained, if still dramatic, pieces.

The work for which Fontans is best known is her enameling. She has developed new techniques for working with opaque enamels, which she treats as a drawing medium. Working on copper, she puts a layer of black enamel on both sides of her form. Layers of white enamel are applied singly, as in *The Canadian Face* (2000), or they are built up slowly to create the subtle rendering of form and volume encountered in traditional painted *grisaille*. Despite its technical challenge, Fontans finds enamel allows her to

fuse life drawing and ornament to make the body an overall canvas of embellishment, form, and personal statement. Upping the technical ante one step further, she sets bezels into the bed of glass to introduce stones into the composition. Enamel is used for stand-alone images, brooches, and domed pendants, or it is combined as a series of components for necklaces. Clasps are frequently enameled, as Fontans believes all aspects of a piece require equal attention to detail and precision.

Shortly before September 11, 2001, Fontans completed *The Canadian Face*, which she feels epitomizes her commitment to multiculturalism and appreciation of her adopted country. The necklace consists of 16 imaginary portraits of women who make up the Canadian mosaic. The faces defy conventional definitions of beauty and, instead, exhibit vivaciousness, personality, and a range of ethnic and racial types. Traced through the top layer of white enamel onto the under layer of black, contour lines defining features and hair are expressive, animated, and spontaneous. The thin cover of white modulates to produce a range of values, giving the simple drawings depth and richness. Fine silver bezels surround and protect each segment, and the decorative jump rings connecting them are set with moonstones to make a truly memorable and hopeful piece that literally wears its politics on its chest.

Throughout her varied career as jeweler, educator, performer and impresario, Fontans has evolved an artistic ethos embracing the body and its aesthetic expression through personal ornament and style. She remains committed to jewelry that is beautiful, well crafted, and expressive of the individual wearer and occasion. Rather than focusing on some single-minded goal, her practice is inclusive, circular, and ecological, in the sense that she reinvents and reuses concepts, objects, and materials from her own personal history and immediate environment. She regards her own work as a found object to be continually played with, updated, and re-framed in new and challenging ways. Her performances and still photographs broach issues of diversity, gender, and identity, yet these themes are always woven into the matrix of the total production and open to individual interpretation. She is committed to the idea that jewelry makes a statement, but that statement is manifested through the body as a context and a point of origin: the body performs its ornament. In this regard, generosity and optimism are integral to her work. ▮

Pendent, 2003
silver, 22k gold, ammolite, peridot
length 18"
Photo: Charles Lewton-Brain

Amy Gogarty, a painter and writer with a special interest in craft, is currently head of Liberal Studies at the Alberta College of Art & Design in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

1 For references to the "monstrous" female body, see Vera Lemecha, ed., "The Female Grotesque," (special issue) *Inversions* (Winnipeg: Mentoring Artists for Women's Art, 1998) and Mary Russo, "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory," *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Laurentis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

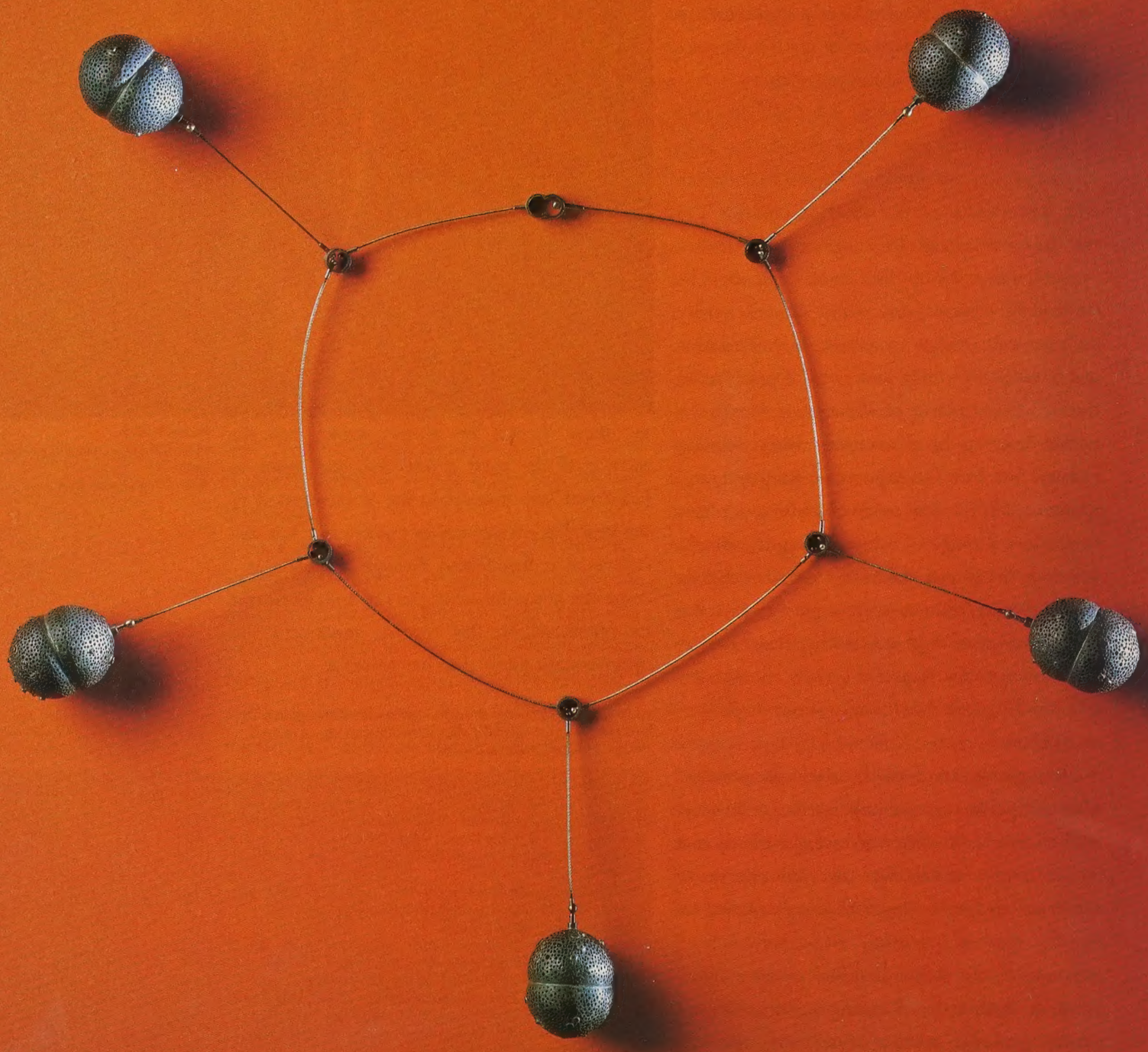
2 Peter Bürger, from the *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974), in *Art and Its Histories: A Reader*, ed. Steve Edwards (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 216-221.

3 Dawn Ades, "Dada and Surrealism," in *Concepts of Modern Art: From Fauvism to Postmodernism*, ed. Nikos Stangos (London: Thames and Hudson 1974; third edition 1994), 110-137.

4 See Mary McLeod, "Everyday and 'Other' Spaces," in *Architecture and Feminism*, eds. Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze and Carol Henderson (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), particularly regarding The Situationists, pp.15-17.

5 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Ontological Foundation of the Occasional and the Decorative," in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 1997), 135.

6 Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act," paper presented to the American Federation of Arts, Houston, Texas, April, 1957, in *The New Art*, ed. Neil Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1966), 25-26.



Capsule Necklace, 2002
oxidized sterling, 14k white gold, stainless steel
length 17"; each capsule 1 1/4 x 1 1/4 x 7/8"

Mystery and Memory

The Jewelry of Sandra Enterline

by Patricia Harris and David Lyon

If Sandra Enterline hadn't become a metalsmith, she might have been a lyric poet. Her stripped-down, elegant forms are a perfect parallel to Archibald MacLeish's exhortation that "A poem should be mute / as a globed fruit. ... A poem should not mean / but be." Or, as William Carlos Williams put it: "not in ideas, but in things." Indeed, "things" are what Enterline makes best, and while her jewelry may evoke a wealth of associations, it is uncluttered by the prosaic trappings of narrative.

Brooch (Untitled), 2003
oxidized sterling silver, abalone shell
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 x 3/8"

Since earning a BFA at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1983, Enterline has narrowed her focus to a handful of simple shapes and forms and has emphasized construction so spare that it might almost seem severe. In the first decade of her career, she often made spheres, but found herself frustrated by what she calls the "industrial" feeling of the shape. Around 1992, she began elongating the halves. "If I raised them up a little bit more, it was an egg form," she recalls, noting that the shape still remained simple and abstract, yet was suggestive of the natural world. Since the early 1990s, she has evolved a library of signature forms—egg, sphere, truncated cone, cylinder, circular medallion, and four-lobed star fruit—that she repeats with endless variation. Each one employs a biomorphic geometry that straddles both the natural world and the constructs of mathematics.

By limiting the sculptural contours of her pieces, Enterline is free to find an expressive vocabulary of placement, surface alterations, material contrasts, and kinetic potential that introduces artistic tension to what begin as elemental forms. In the "Totem Pendant" group, for example, Enterline

explores trailing strings of spheres and ovoids—almost an analog in metal to the accordion-like strands of whelk egg cases. Each "egg" becomes a serial object, and because Enterline tops each pendant with a half-shape, the artifice is obvious, however natural the shape. In effect, the artist lets the viewer in on how the hollowware structure was built, branding a seemingly "natural" form as a clearly constructed artifact.

Enterline describes her process as meditative. "I almost get in a hypnotic state," she says. "I'm looking for a vibration between materials—it's very intuitive."

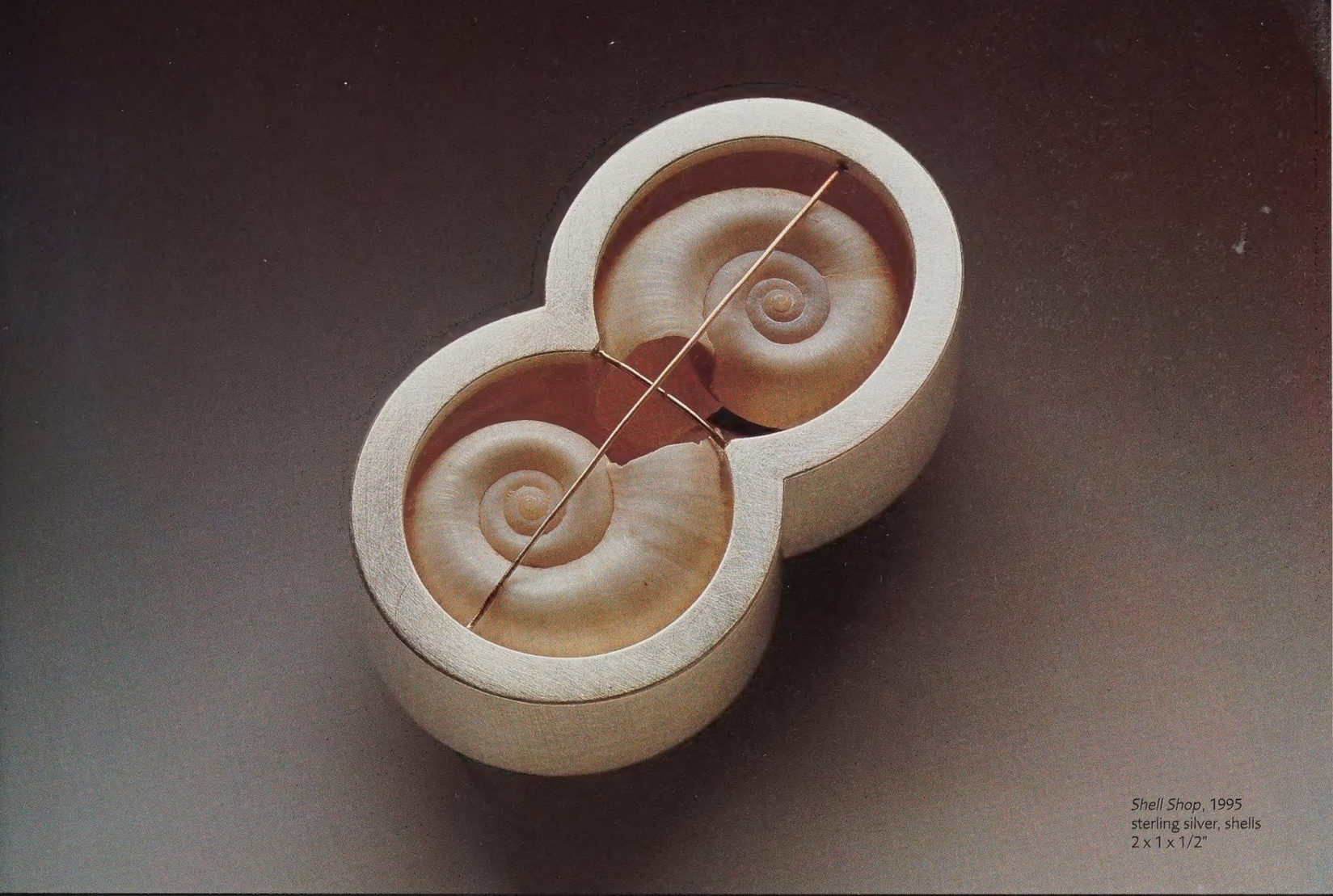
Black Gold, 2001
18k gold, crude oil, petroleum
length 42"; each vial 5 x 1 x 1"

In Enterline's mind, a 1993 necklace from her "Opposition" series captures "everything that I'm trying to fulfill in my work every day." The piece features an 18k gold egg and an oxidized silver egg on a stainless steel cable. It is one of the most minimal constructions she could make, and yet the simplicity of the forms is misleading. "I feel like there's a lot of layered complexity to it in terms of tension between the precious and the non-precious, between the front of the body and the back of the body, between the natural world and the industrial world," Enterline says. The springiness of the cable gives the necklace a taut dynamic on the body, and the contrast between materials and how they are placed by the wearer brings the work to life.

The human body animates Enterline's jewelry to such an extent that some necklaces, in particular, appear unfinished on display. But on the body, they quicken as the elements move with the rhythm and contours of the wearer. For example, a 2002 necklace in the "Capsule" series is designed to be worn with two capsules falling on the back and three on the front of the body. Lean over, and they shift. Movement on the body highlights the two-versus-three composition and emphasizes the surprising lightness of volumetric forms.

Since the late 1990s, Enterline has focused on perforating the surfaces of her pieces to extend the emotional and artistic complexity of her forms, which are constructed from 20 gauge or thinner sheet sterling silver or 18k gold. Before assembling the pieces, she drills the sheet metal with hundreds, even thousands, of tiny holes in varying sizes. (She drills before assembly to make it easier to clean up burrs.)

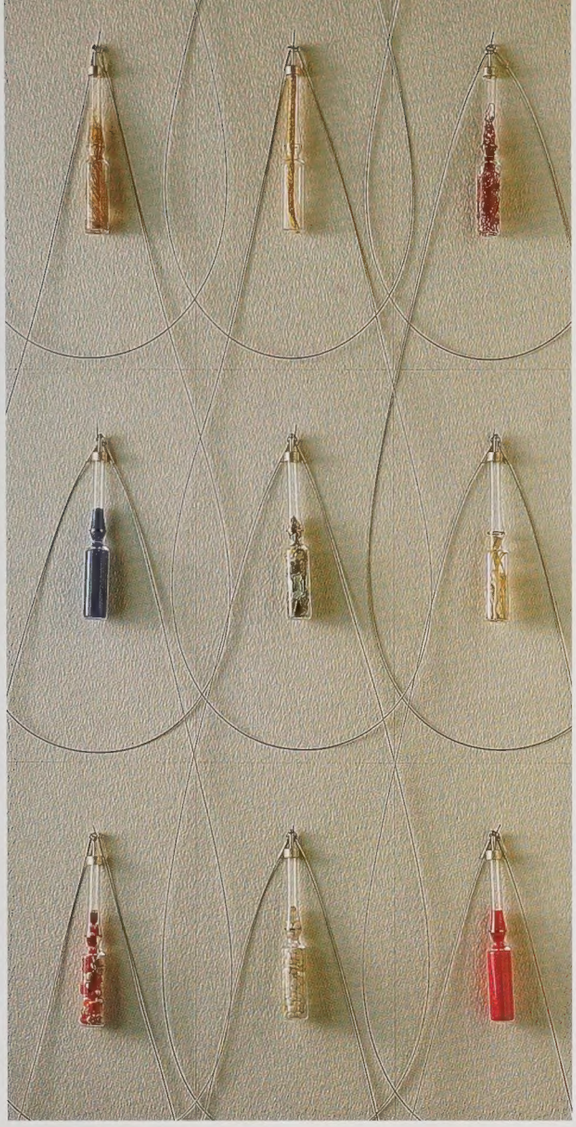
Enterline describes her process as meditative. "I almost get in a hypnotic state," she says. "I'm thinking about tree rings while I'm drilling, or I'm thinking about coral. I'm looking for a vibration between materials—it's very intuitive. I want them to shimmer and vibrate." The effect is to transform solid metal into a patterned mesh of varying opacity. Both the physical and visual weight of the metal is reduced, and the pattern of the perforations creates visually arresting designs. Drilling effectively doubles the number of finished surfaces by exposing the interior; it also dramatically alters the play of light by introducing a kinetic element.



Shell Shop, 1995
sterling silver, shells
2 x 1 x 1/2"

Ten Mile 4, 1995
sterling silver, shell
2 x 2 x 7/8"

Mother Lode with Box, 1997
22k gold, glass, panned gold, box
length 17"



1000 Souvenirs, 1999
glass, sterling silver, steel, found objects
each vial: 3 1/2 x 5/8 x 5/8"

The result is comparable to facets on a gem—the more refractive surfaces, the more the light bounces around. As the body moves, light flickers through the holes in patterns that become increasingly complex as planes slide past each other. The simple form of *Cylinder Pendant* (1997) seems to twinkle as light passes from side to side. The truncated cones of *Duo Pendant* (1997) create a more complicated shimmering pattern. A star fruit pendant, with its multiple planes and thousands of perforations, positively glimmers.

Enterline's resistance to narrative serves her well in the drilling, where it would be easy to mimic a natural pattern or impose a contrived, literal imagery, especially on the face of a large brooch. But her patterning mixes hole sizes and separations, creating the appearance of sheerly random process. If a pattern emerges, it is likely the haphazard scatter of stars on a dark night in the country, of whitecaps distributed on a windy sea, or the riotous points of a fistful of Queen Anne's lace flowers.

Around 1994, Enterline says, the scope of her work expanded when she began to feel free to let go of the strictures of her training and work with mixed materials. The genesis was a "eureka!" moment. Having discovered that she could extend the forms of half spheres to produce ovoids, she thought, "Why can't I just use the real egg?" In retrospect, the leap from the constructed egg to the egg itself seems inevitable. Enterline began by building thick silver walls around delicate and fragile found objects. *Ten Mile 4* and *Shell Shop*, both from 1995, partially conceal and partially reveal coiled snail shells as pure and abstract as any Edward Weston photograph. *Maruwa Pendant* (1994) accomplishes the same for a quail egg.

Such conventionally beautiful natural objects assume a quality of "otherness" when they are lifted from their context in the natural world.

For "Brooching It Diplomatically," a 1998 exhibition inspired by then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's disclosure that she coordinated her jewelry with her diplomatic missions, Enterline mounted a bee in a circular golden box on a field of saffron stamens. She titled it *Queen Bee*. The gold was an essential part of the design.

Queen Bee Brooch, 1998
18k gold, hymenoptera, crocus sativus (pollen), glass
3/4 x 1 3/4 x 3/4"

Around 1994, Enterline says, the scope of her work expanded when she began to feel free to let go of the strictures of her training and work with mixed materials. The genesis was a "eureka!" moment.

"Whenever I use insects I always combine them with 18k gold," Enterline says. "I don't just use it because it's a pretty color, or because I enjoy working with it. It's a very loaded material. Pairing it with something like the insect creates a vibration of the eye and mind going back and forth between the two materials. That fascinates me."

Duo Pendant, 1997
pierced sterling silver, heat patina
1 1/2 x 1 3/8 x 1 3/8"

Just as Enterline relies on her intuition in handling forms that she constructs, she also trusts her emotional and aesthetic responses to found objects. Certain materials so intrigue her that she places them in glass ampules where their unexpected characteristics become the visual focus. In a series of pendants she calls *Black Gold*, Enterline returned to her hometown of Oil City, Pennsylvania, to collect crude oil. The narrative context of the pieces is divorced from the aesthetic accomplishment. Instead, the emotional freight of the work derives from confounding expectation. Even the term "crude" oil suggests something unattractive, undesirable, and unappealing. Yet the viscous liquid (which she sometimes pairs with vials of lighter colored refined petroleum) has a shimmering amber beauty that Enterline underscores by using gold caps and findings.

She obscures the objects behind a screen of metal, making them as precious as a chalice in the tabernacle, as intimate as the face behind a veil. Their power derives from mystery.

The little vials of panned gold sold in California souvenir shops appeal to her for "pure beauty and mystery of the material" as well as for the low-rent funkiness of "the little plastic stopper and vial, and thinking that a thousand Boy Scouts have these little vials in their pockets." Here is a precious material—pure gold—that has been reduced to kitsch. Her challenge is to restore its beauty. *Mother Lode with Box* (1997) demonstrates the magic of the transformation. The necklace of 19 vials of panned gold suspended in liquid, owned by the Renwick Gallery, works a kind of alchemy by formalizing the presentation of the rustic bits of gold, creating a sympathetic vibration between the raw gold in the vials and the exquisitely finished gold of the structural necklace.

Enterline carried the glass-vial presentation to a logical extreme with her 1999 installation piece *1000 Souvenirs*. The title alone could make a viewer assume Enterline is a sentimentalist—encasing bits of her past to hold onto them. But the project of a thousand necklaces of glass ampules with silver caps on stainless steel cord incorporates "found" objects, many of which have no direct connection to Enterline other than her solicitation of contributions. In many respects, the objects captured in glass become anonymous, raising questions about what items we imbue with meaning and why. The contained objects exist out of time and context; the viewer knows only that someone once saw each item as significant. Thus, one person's emotional attachment becomes the next person's charged mystery.

Enterline's focus on pure forms in metal, on one hand, and on the loaded characteristics of found materials, on the other, also reaches a kind of synthesis. She obscures the objects behind a screen of metal, making them as precious as a chalice in the tabernacle, as intimate as the face behind a veil. Their power derives from mystery. "After exposing shells and quail eggs, I began to think that maybe I wanted things more hidden," she explains.

In the "Bone Room" series of the mid-1990s, she began to capitalize on her perforated metal to supply the solution. She could place objects inside the idealized form, where the metal scrim would render them only dimly visible. "I was looking for a vibration between the interior and the exterior, and of the mystery of not really being able to see the object completely," Enterline says. "I'm capturing it, housing it, catching it—but you can't have it."

Two pieces from 2003 present Enterline at the top of her form. She is exercising a new vocabulary in which the enclosed objects both

Cylinder Pendant, 1997
pierced sterling silver, heat patina
3 3/4 x 7/8 x 7/8"

Brooch (Untitled), 2002
oxidized sterling silver, 24k gold
2 1/2 x 2 3/4 x 3/4"

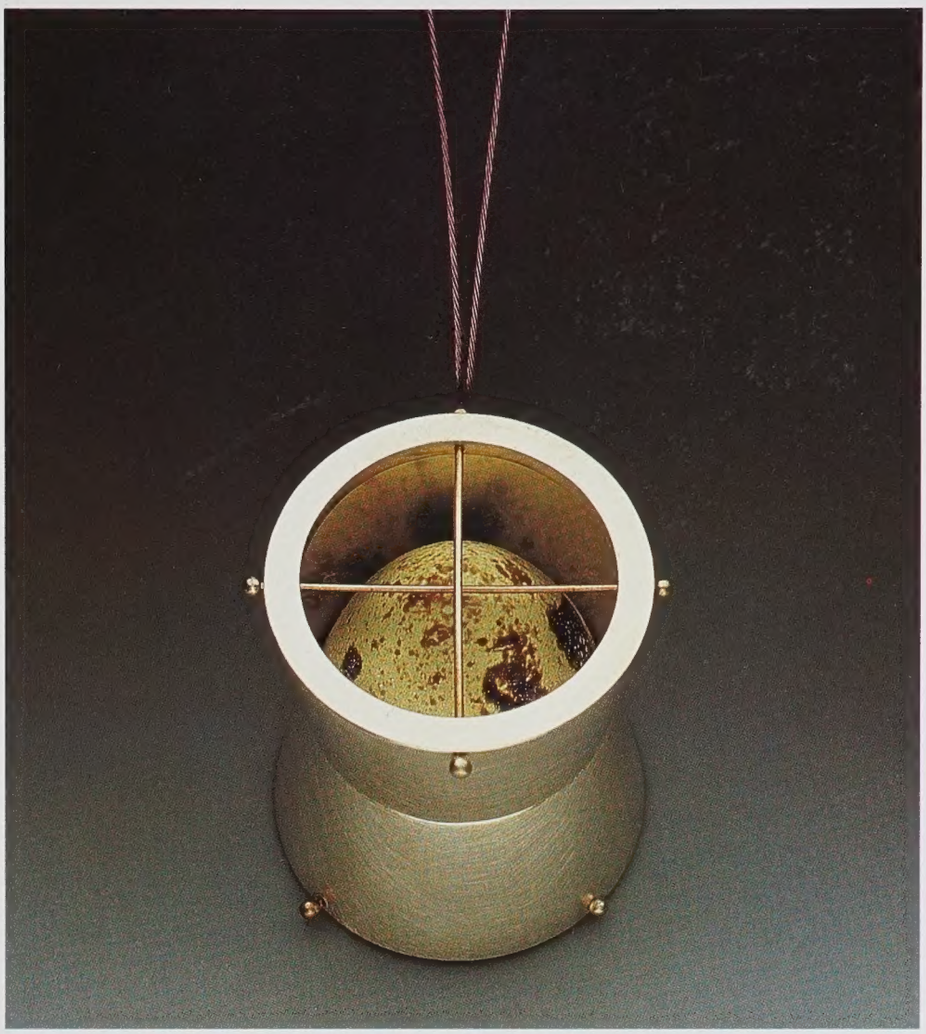
retain their identity and become abstract elements of composition, prized for the ways they interact with the shimmering light passing through the perforations. The face of her *Ruby Tear* brooch is drilled with tiny holes of at least three sizes, and the polished interior amply reflects light behind the oxidized exterior. Within the brooch, dozens of loose rubies literally rattle around and flash light as the wearer moves. They are sensuous and desirable—and completely out of reach, safe from touch. The rubies create a delicious tease.

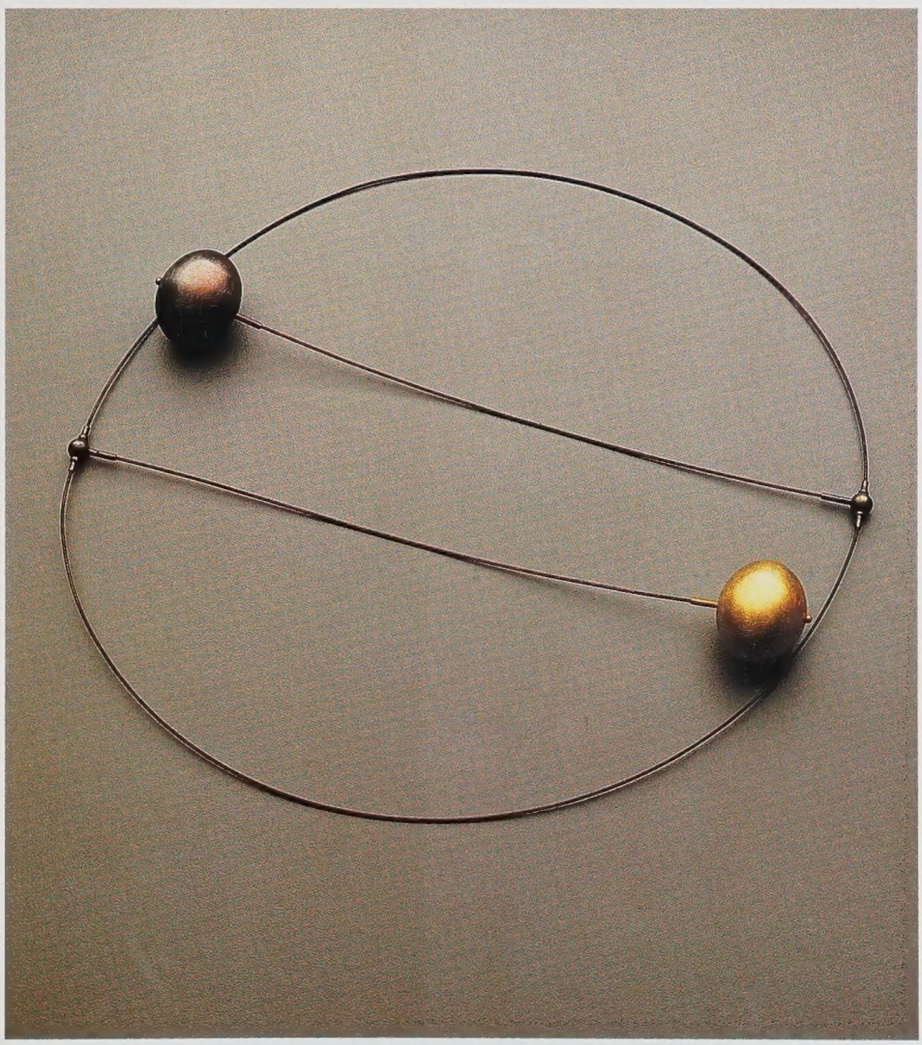
But the encased material need not be precious per se. Enterline found herself captivated at a recent gem show not just by heaps of stones, but by bins of abalone shell. Thinking at first that she might do a send-up of 1960s shell jewelry, she found instead that the shimmering mother of pearl presented a visual complement to her perforated metal. So rather than enclose the shell, she riveted a large piece to the back of a metal form perforated with an exuberant pattern. When the piece is held up to the light, the shell glows like amber stained glass. When it is worn on the body, light flashes inside with a blue-silver glimmer.

Her experience with the rubies and the abalone confirm that Enterline has not yet reached the limits of her formal approach. She has been focused on drilling metal forms since about 1997, refining her technique and expanding her vocabulary. "In the last year or two," she says, "I'm finally really taking it to a new realm. I don't get sick of it. I just keep investigating because it keeps taking me further." ⧗

Critics **Patricia Harris** and **David Lyon** write from Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Photos: Mark Johann





right, top to bottom
Maruwa Pendant, 1994
sterling silver, 14k gold, quail egg, steel
1 1/2 x 1 1/8 x 1 1/8"

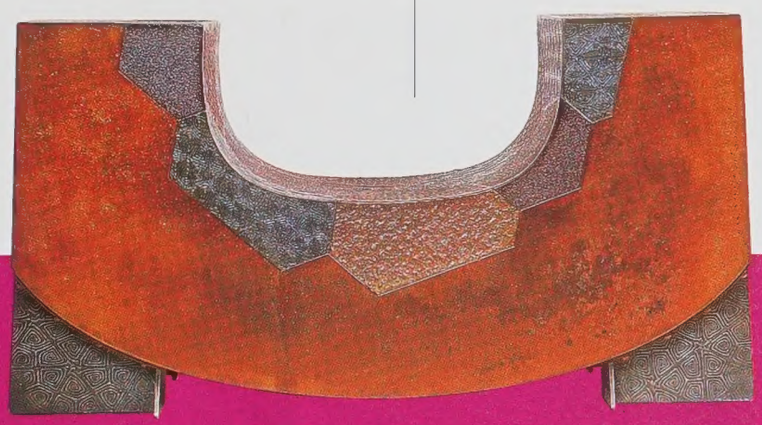
Opposition Series, 1993
oxidized silver, 18k gold, nickel cable
1 x 1 1/4 x 1"

Winging, 2000
bonze, pâte de fer
21 1/4 x 8 x 11"
Photo: Roger Wade

David Secrest

The Man with X-Ray Vision

by Barbra Brady



Lodestone, 2003
bronze, steel
60 x 30 1/2 x 17 1/2"
Photo: Kelly Nelson

On a desk in David Secrest's living room sits an antique ophthalmology machine. Meant for the examination of the inner structure of the eye, it now holds a small irregular chunk of metal, which to the unaided eye appears as a mere nugget of bronze. Upon peering through the eyepiece, however, another world—the microscopic depth of the metal's surface—is revealed. It is a whimsical, yet prescient introduction to an individual who seems to do nothing on empty whim.

On a conceptual and even visual basis, the design and structure of Secrest's hand-built home/studio is indistinguishable from his metal sculpture. The elegantly rustic building that Secrest has been methodically crafting since 1978 is reflective of how he structures his work. Every surface of timber, wood, window, and stone come together to form a functional engineering of aesthetics and clean joinery. Functionally, it serves as a working space and shelter. Aesthetically and experientially, it is not unlike peering through his ophthalmometer at one of his sculptures. You ascend the hand-wrought stairs from his ground level studio to the second floor living space and upper floor bedrooms noticing the intriguing angles and supporting structures of the building, a magnification of the purposeful composition of elements that are a hallmark of Secrest's work. From every aspect, it is clear that Secrest's way of working is a thorough reflection of not only his intellect, skill, and aesthetic, but his way of living, looking at the world, and his very upbringing.

David Secrest is to the manor of craftsmen born. Coming from a family of creative people—his father a potter, his mother a painter, his brother Peter now a respected contemporary glass artist—he notes that his training derived from hands-on observing and assisting, rather than through formal education. His father and brother Phil built and operated a ceramics studio in New York State, which

Secrest considers his primary training ground. His uncle later opened a small gallery and studio in Wellfleet, Massachusetts, where Secrest worked during summers while in high school. Secrest sees this "lack" of formal training as instrumental to his learning and creative process, just as he views his having lived in rural western Montana for nearly 30 years as integral to the development of his techniques. Being steeped in the world of artisanry as a boy instilled in him an appreciation of craftsmanship, one not tainted or questioned as he suspects it might have been had he gone through a formal study of studio art and art history. When asked how living in the remote region of western Montana has influenced his work, he does not cite the grand landscape, but rather speculates that had he stayed in the northeast, exposure to, and influence by artists in the mainstream might have altered the necessity of learning his own method by experiment. In bypassing the academy, he was unrestricted by someone correcting or redirecting him by saying, *this* is the way to do it. Without external pressure or supervision, he was free to experiment, and by trial, error, and vision, to develop his own course of creation in rendering sculpture and functional forms of patterned forged iron, fabricated steel, and bronze.

Rapunzel, 1991
wrought iron, steel
31 1/2 x 12 x 6"
Photo: Marshal Noice

When asked how living in the remote region of western Montana has influenced his work, he does not cite the grand landscape, but rather speculates that had he stayed in the northeast, exposure to, and influence by artists in the mainstream might have altered the necessity of learning his own method by experiment.

While art historical references exist in Secrest's work, they are non-specific, pan-cultural. One might recognize elements suggestive of Japanese architecture, African Kuba cloths, Byzantine pattern, or even Neolithic tools, but he feels that his inherent influence is not specific to one culture. He comments, "I think that's what a great deal of art is about, reaching that part of you that is intellectually inaccessible. . . . I don't want people to be able to place it." Secrest has an admiration and fascination for the historical and cultural use of ancient tools, and the workers who utilized them in their daily work. *Rapunzel*, a wrought iron and steel sculpture from 1991, suggests in its suspended totem, blade-like form a non-specific archeological finding. Closer inspection reveals a surface shaped by Secrest's signature style: astute aesthetics and a mastery of joining surface textures of varying density and complexity. While some surfaces are relatively smooth and spare, others offer a kaleidoscope of pattern.

The combination of minimal and patterned metal has transformed over time in Secrest's work. The vertically-oriented, exuberant abstract figural works of the 1990s have evolved into a strong, if not exclusive, focus on architectural and functional sculpture.[1] The ophthalmometer-assisted view into the surface structure of bronze is more than a mere metaphor for Secrest's fascination with, and study of, the inner structure of materials and finished forms. Secrest is known for being elusive when it comes to discussing the "why" of his process, but his artist statement offers a forensic clue about his design. "Natural objects provide the basis for my sense of design: however, it is the conceptualization of structure and the intentional manipulation of materials that hold my interest." Among the books in his collection are texts on the physics of soap bubbles, and he freely discusses fractals, with their mathematical observation of the overall structure of, for example, a head of cauliflower bearing a similarity to that of the individual sprig. Secrest

Thicket, 2002
steel, cast bronze
32 1/2 x 19 1/2 x 19 1/2"
Photo: Chris Autio

Froth, 2002
steel, cast bronze
72 x 21 x 18"
Photo: Chris Autio

Curvilinear Parallelepipedon, 2000
steel, bronze
19 1/2 x 57 1/2 x 21"
Photo: Scott Young

Syncline Saddle, 2000
bronze, steel
29 x 41 x 18"

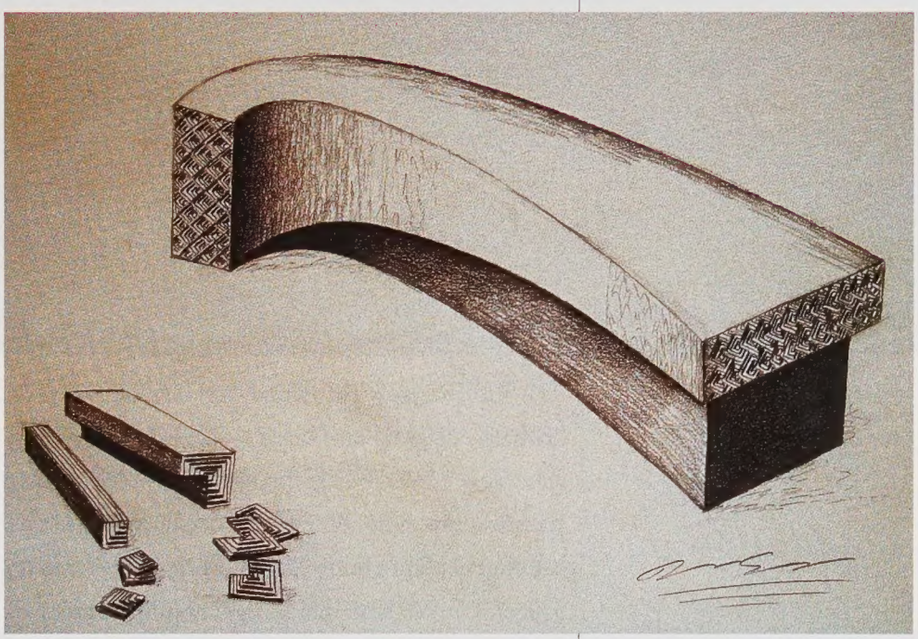
is intent upon the structural relationship between the larger whole and individual parts of his works, similar to the way in which structural patterns recur from "galaxies down to nuclei." To contemplate such scale as one sits on one of Secrest's public benches may not be a crucial aspect in its appreciation, but it is, however subliminally, intrinsic to how the form evolved from notion to crafted structure. As he says, "there is present in the finished piece an encrypted history of its making."

value unto itself for Secrest. Such recognition of the viewer, especially in his functional public work (furniture), is indicative of Secrest's democratic approach to art, which without a responder has incomplete function, like an unread book. His consideration of the interactive value of architectural furniture recalls that of artist Scott Burton, who conveys a similar concern for the social value of his public works: "...the individual liberty of the artist is a pretty trivial area. Communal and social values are now more important. What office workers do in their lunch hour is more important than my pushing the limits of my self-expression."[3]

Secrest is intent upon the structural relationship between the larger whole and individual parts of his works, similar to the way in which structural patterns recur from "galaxies down to nuclei."

This is an artist whose every notion and creation is deliberate, on just such a comprehensive scale; for Secrest, the "doing and making is my world." The doing and making for Secrest typically begins at the sketchbook. Once he sees the image on paper, he senses how it needs to feel, the visual rendering in hand serves to draw out his tactile understanding. Then begins the ciphering, the exploration of materials, and the critical element of orchestrating the metalworking sequence. The sketches themselves are lovely, minimal, and have a subtle sense of movement. They could easily stand alone as fully considered artistic endeavors. However, for Secrest, they are more practical in nature—"Iron is hard to work with, sketches are not." From there, he will typically prepare stock for the structures, adjust the sketches after beginning to make his materials, refine the form he wants to produce, then "crank it out."

If Secrest were strictly a scientist, he would be a practical, not theoretic, one. When he asserts, "Art without craft would just be a notion," any reticence to discuss that "why" of his work is vanquished. Theory without practice does not hold Secrest's interest. "An idea has value only with the application of craft. I am an artist when I have the idea, when I sketch it I am a designer, when I make it I am metalsmith/craftsman."[2] The value of his personal experience is in the changes from raw material to object, and how the object ages. The subsequent response of the viewer is a



Drawing for Curvilinear Parallelepipedon, 2000

The upper surface of *Froth* (2002), is representative of Secrest's sublime juxtaposition of varying patterns of steel and bronze. This "shadow patterning" comes into being by virtue of the viewing angle. A single mosaic pattern of zig-zags becomes interlocking diamonds when the light shifts across the minute differences in surface depth, and any change in the viewer's orientation alters the image. This shape-shifting of signature scroll and tile-like patterning brings to mind the repeating geometric patterns and spatial illusions of graphic artist M. C. Escher, whose mathematically complex patterns prompt a second look, but are mostly a clever visual pun.

Valley Fault (Two Tables), 1999
bronze, steel
Photo: Scott Young

The interlocking patterned surfaces of *Froth*, or *Lodestone* (2003), also elicit a second look, but in the case of Secrest's imagery the dovetailing patterns are subtext, not the main content. The intelligence informing *Froth* is both aesthetic in its graceful curve, and mathematical in its joinery of varying patterns. The angles where patterns are welded together conform to the way that soap bubbles join and organize themselves into specific angles. This correlation expresses why, for such an artist who shuns straight lines ("they seem weak"), curvature of surface is important. When three patterned surfaces meet along a curve, they do so at angles of 120° with respect to each other. The point at which four boundaries meet will always divide into two, forming two points each, with three adjoining boundaries at 120° (the angle changing to 90° if there is a ridged boundary). This insight into soap bubble mechanics inspires the viewer to look more closely, as if seeing with x-ray eyes into the atomic arrangement, the geological strata within.

David Secrest's signature material, which he dubbed pâte de fer, is a paste of iron files and metal shards that are tightly packed into a container, placed in the forge, and then formed into a concoction that visually suggests the convoluted geological pushing of plate tectonics. While pattern welded steel is an intrinsic element drawing attention to the surface of Secrest's forms, it is not a superficial decoration. In *Syncline Saddle* (2000), or *Winging* (2000), the pâte de fer lends a sense of a cross-section, a dense, core sample of the sculpture's metal structure. It evokes the observation of crystalline structure and underlying strata, a fascinating look into what's inside. In technique and aesthetics, pâte de fer grants us an element of x-ray vision. The viewer sees deeper than skin deep, glimpsing how the works might have evolved over geological time from the inside out. Geological occurrence is also evoked in *Valley Fault* (1999), two tables of bronze and steel. Here Secrest gives a nearly representational rendering of splitting along fault lines, with the upper surfaces clad in variegated shadow patterned metals suggestive of plate tectonics. The viewer senses the relationship of the internal

structure to the exterior, of the development from the inner toward outer surface.

Jeffrey Funk, a fellow Montana artist and metalworker, has followed the evolution and singular development of Secrest's work. Funk credits Secrest for using pattern-welding iron on an unprecedentedly large, architectural scale. Funk notes that Secrest "designs problems for himself," a statement paralleled by the artist's claim that he "savors the eloquent execution to a difficult problem." Taking on "problems" led to a watershed for Secrest around 1980, as he began patterning iron in ways never done before, working in a tradition used almost exclusively on smaller scale pieces like hand-crafted knives and Damascus steel weapons.

Detail of a metal plate used to produce shadow patterning, 2003

The patterns that result from Secrest's style of patterned welding are evident in the mosaic-like surfaces of works such as *Lodestone*, *Thicket* (2002), or *Curvilinear Parallelepipedon* (2000). With their architectural scale, one can appreciate them from a distance, in an open landscape. *Lodestone* seems slightly ceremonial—it could be a throne. *Thicket*'s upper surface is fissured, a "frame" guides the eyes to look down into what lies beneath, and recalls peering through a glass-bottomed boat to the wonders below. These elements are as consistent—and varying—in Secrest's work as they are in nature. One comes to recognize his forms, their prominent curves, their nearly smooth side panels leading to the patterning at certain junctures and surfaces. As in *Curvilinear Parallelepipedon*, where scrolls evoke the cool elegance and architectural arrangement of glass blocks, each section of metal merges in a seamless, well-proportioned fashion.

One could go into great detail about the "how to" aspects of Secrest's studio work. There would be the metal going into the forge, red hot, then thrown into water, where it gets brittle, and how he breaks it by hand into shards, then lays those down and forges them together. A technical manual could be written with his recipe for folding and slicing ingredients, and at which temperature they sit in the forge. It might have a chapter on the steps of his oxidation process, how he etches and pits the surface, and conjures color variations. Or, one could shift the focus away from the obvious technique to the ponderings of the creator and his pursuit of clarity. An artist who, in explaining the physics of fusing metal equates it to the internal structure of ice and snowflakes, with their unique surface edges. One who speaks about how snow, at first fluffy, becomes stiff when ploughed, and in this telling provides a perfect illumination of his own work for a layman. In such a way, studying Secrest's work heightens our perception and spurs us to seek the hidden workings of all things. If a key role of an artist is to show us things we may not typically notice, then David Secrest succeeds admirably at this task. ⧗

An artist who, in explaining the physics of fusing metal equates it to the internal structure of ice and snowflakes, with their unique surface edges.

Barbra Brady is an independent writer and curator who lives in Missoula, Montana.

1 Taken from wall text written by curator Stephen Glueckert for the exhibition "Primal Visions," 1991, Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, Great Falls, Montana.

2 This and all other unattributed quotes taken from author's conversation and written communication with the artist, June-July 2003.

3 Douglas C. McGill, "Sculpture Goes Public," *The New York Times Magazine*, 27 April 1986, p. 67.

"ANNE BARROS: FORK LIFTING"

new, TORONTO
SEPTEMBER 3-21, 2003

by BARBARA ISHERWOOD

In "Fork Lifting," silversmith and craft historian Anne Barros breaks new ground in the conception and presentation of flatware. For many, it comes as a surprise that the fork could be so captivating a subject, but Barros's in-depth study of this quotidian table tool reveals the fascinating origins of an object now taken for granted. For the benefit of visitors to *new*, a panel explained that in much of the Western world, forks were not mandatory at the table until the Victorian era. In fact, the fork was at one time associated with excessive sumptuousness and even licentious behavior. Fingers were considered perfectly adequate for picking up food.

The forks Barros has created play wittily upon this intriguing history. Eschewing the glass case and pedestal approach to display, Barros opted for two narrow tables, emulating medieval dining customs. One was elegantly draped in tangerine silk; the other, a weathered workman's bench, was covered in coarsely textured cloth.

On the luxurious table were fabric-wrapped pads, suggestive of place settings, each supporting groups of forks ranging in treatment from ornate to streamlined. A pair of lace garbed forks with fanciful, wavy tines refer to the aristocratic fashions of seventeenth-century Frenchmen, who took up the then-feminine custom of using forks to avoid sullying their lace cuffs. The idea of forks as substitutes for fingers is beautifully captured in a fork with distended tines that resemble a hand about to pick up a morsel of food. A spiraling ribbon of patinated copper decorates the long and gently curving handle.

The historical association of forks with fine, even frivolous living is recalled in a pair whose simple shape is decorated by streamers of colored sterling and copper.

Other groups reflect the style for which Barros is best known—modernism enlivened by surprising, often whimsical details. A fork shaped like stylized waves is discreetly punctuated by a gemstone. A curl of copper and a dangling wire break up the vertical line of an elongated fork with two fang-like tines. One fork is still attached to the sheet metal from which it was sawed, in reference to the die stamping process used in production line cutlery. Its painted surface is inscribed with a French menu item, alluding to the development of culinary arts that parallels the widespread use of the fork.

The forks on the weathered table stood in stark contrast to their fanciful sisters. Blackened, broken, and twisted, with handles wrapped in baked bread, these deconstructed forks represent the issue of worldwide hunger—as a maker of luxury objects, Barros felt this important to address. Framed in groupings by iron binding wire, they made a graphically arresting and provocative statement that became an excellent point of departure for dialogue.

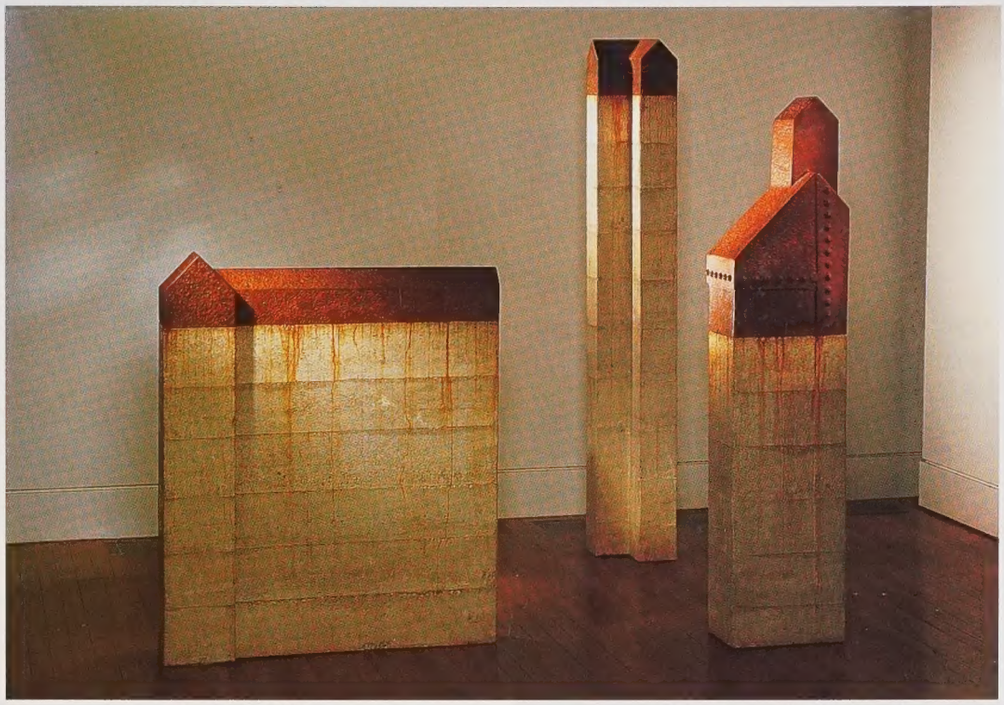
To complete the installation, Barros included her drawings of period forks observed in museums, and the designs she produced following her travels. A sound piece, created by Dafydd Hughes, features the sounds of forks tinkling, and a female voice reading French menus. During a busy day at the gallery, it was easy to miss the soundscape, but during quiet moments it added to the ambiance of this well conceived show.

Barbara Isherwood is a Toronto-based writer on visual arts and craft.

clockwise from lower left
Fingers/Fork, 2003
sterling silver, patinated copper
length 10"

Circus Forks, 2003
silk, sterling silver
length 12"

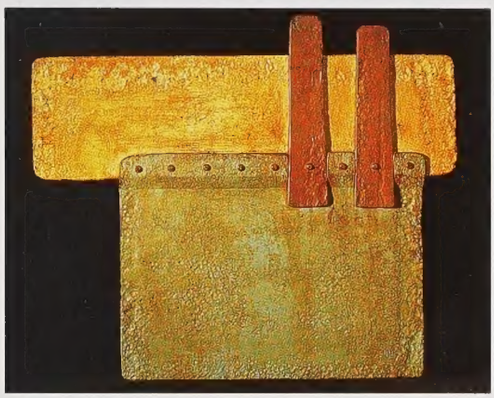
Installation view of "Anne Barros: Fork Lifting," at *new* gallery, Toronto, 2003



"GRAVITY: SCULPTURE AND DRAWINGS ON STEEL BY HOSS HALEY"

BLUE SPIRAL GALLERY, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA
JUNE 26-AUGUST 23, 2003

by KATE DOBBS ARIAIL



The first time I saw Hoss Haley's work, I stood in the middle of the gallery and laughed out loud in delight at his superbly crafted Rube Goldbergian sculptures. His new work on display this summer at Blue Spiral Gallery did not inspire effervescent mirth, but the quieter happiness that comes from looking at art that is just right, with all its relationships fully thought out.

Haley's art is remarkably whole. He's a blacksmith who draws; a painter who sculpts. When he makes an object, its surfaces are as potent and evocative as its volumes. When he makes a painting, he pulls you through its precisely limned picture plane into a vast imaginary space.

The exhibition was dominated by the drawings on steel, which have the pleasing attribute of becoming more interesting the longer you look at them, but the sculptures were stronger. Particularly alive in the space were *Yellow Sphere*, *White Sphere*, and *Green Sphere*. All are composed of 1/4-inch thick riveted steel strips and open intervals around a core of air, which seems especially dense, contained, and separated from the air outside. Strip widths are carefully scaled to the size of the spheres, and the steel itself bears the marks of its age and experience, carrying the message of time's gravity.

Of these three sculptures, the best is *Green Sphere*, which is not fully spherical. It is a more completely closed form than the others, and not dependent for interest on the interstices among the riveted metal strips. Bringing to mind the work of such different artists as Mario Merz and Andy Goldsworthy, it sits on the floor as if it had settled there, nestling itself into the earth under the natural force of gravity. You feel you could scoop beneath the floorboards and find the bottom of the sphere. At the same time, the circular placement of the steel strips gives the sculpture an energetic spinning quality, as if it were a planet tilted on its axis and might move away from you at any moment, following an orbital path that mysteriously passes through solid Earth.

Haley's wonderful house form sculptures, instead of sinking through the Earth, soar from it. The three pieces, titled *Wing, Elevation,* and *Sentinel*, rise from the floor like the grain elevators of Haley's Kansas youth rising above the plain. This grouping makes a witty comment on the relations of "base" and "sculpture." While there is a clear demarcation between the rusted-metal house form "sculptures" and the pale cast concrete "bases" that extend the forms downward to the floor, in fact both components comprise the artwork—which stands on its own, not requiring any gallery assistance in positioning itself at the height desired by the artist. But these are things you think of later. Initially, you are taken by the physical presence and tactile qualities of the work—the way the clean, modern forms are built of heavy old steel; the way the deeply pitted and pocked surfaces are set off by the smooth-ground welds of the precisely made forms; the way steel and concrete are united by a fresh warm rust patina that has run down over the concrete.

Two wall sculptures display an exquisite sensitivity to materials and to texture, tone, and placement. *Field* and *Range* could be brooches made for giants by a jeweler working with slabs of recycled industrial material. In *Field*, two unequally sized strips of heavily rusted steel connect a horizontal rectangle colored a golden-brownish white to a greenish square studded with large rivet heads, as decorative in their way as a row of gemstones. The design and craft of these pieces are very fine, but the beauty of the surfaces is particularly striking. Some have been treated by time, others newly hammered or manipulated, but all have been patinated or painted to bring up hidden emotional qualities.

Unfortunately, the large drawings on steel did not have that revelatory quality. Deft, precise explorations of solid geometry and perspective, they investigate rather than reveal. These drawings are extremely handsome works—the enamel paint surface on the smooth steel is even beautiful—but very cool. The pleasure here lies in admiring Haley's skill at creating the imaginary space, and in grasping more fully some of his formal and intellectual concerns. The drawings of houses, for instance, make it clear that it is not just the form that interests him, but the repetition of it, and the nexus created by the placement of the repeated forms. In the drawings of organic entities, like trees or beehives, we see his fascination with creating volume from line. Perhaps the drawings' greatest merit lies in their assertion of Haley's Precisionist nature, and the understanding that brings to our contemplation of his marvelous sculptures.

Kate Dobbs Ariail is a cultural critic residing in Durham, North Carolina.

clockwise from top left
Green Sphere, 2003
enamel paint on steel
36 x 48"

Wing, 2003
steel, cast concrete
48 x 40 x 8"
Elevation, 2003
steel, cast concrete,
74 x 10 x 10"
Sentinel, 2003
steel, cast concrete
66 x 15 x 10"

Field, 2002
steel, paint
22 x 26 x 2 1/2"
Photo: Ken Pitts

"ON LONGING: THE JEWELRY OF SHARON CHURCH AND MARY PRESTON"

THE JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER ARTS CENTER,
SHEBOYGAN, WISCONSIN
JUNE 22-OCTOBER 5, 2003

by FRANK C. LEWIS

Both nature and the past are problematic. On the one hand, we are sure that these concepts describe some kind of reality, on the other, the realities they describe often seem remote, just out of reach. And our efforts to grasp their essence and meaning result only in longing.

Conversely, what can be more tangible than jewelry? The comfortable heft of metal, the impermeability of precious metal and stone, the gloss of a polished surface, or the deep rich color of a matte finish all have a satisfactory presence, an emphatic "objectness" in a world of illusions and memories.

It is no surprise then that jewelers have often sought to bridge the interstices between nature and the past and the materiality of life. Merely good jewelers find some success in this undertaking through a kind of slavish imitation of nature, casting a twig and electroforming a leaf, or collecting the detritus of daily life into a collage-like brooch or necklace. Great jewelers, on the other hand, recognize the limitations of such approaches. Great jewelers understand that to rationalize or objectify nature and the past is to lose something of their very essence. Great jewelers and great jewelry tease us with illusion, offering us objects that rest in our hands yet exceed our grasp. By this definition Sharon Church and Mary Preston are great jewelers.

Church has long exhibited a fascination with the paradoxically eternal and ephemeral aspects of nature: petals or leaves hand wrought in silver cascading in a necklace that would be an apt attribute of the goddess Flora. Some of her pieces on display at the John Michael Kohler Art Center, however, appear to be the pods and ovaries of a plant left over after a game of "she loves me, she loves me not." These deflowered, as it were, objects like *Commemorative Brooch for a Bleeding Heart*, or *Corsage* seem to shrivel and become brittle. Often dark in color, the pieces recall the mourning jewelry of the nineteenth century or a brown and wilted corsage, saved from a prom night many years ago.

Many of the materials directly invoke viewers' associations with nature. Along with gold and sterling, Church employs leather, an assortment of exotic woods, buffalo horn, and deer antler. One seeks to caress this variety of surfaces, turn them in the hand to study their forms, reenacting the steps of their creation in a way that is similar to the process we undergo when imagining the latent potentiality of a seedpod or acorn. Invariably one relates these mementos and husks with the artist's grief on the sudden loss of her husband in 1995, but as in all of the most successful memorials Church transcends the specific event to enable the work to touch something in everyone. We sympathize with the artist but we also weep at the conjuring of our own memories of loss.

While Church finds the correlative for longing in nature, Mary Preston looks to history and the often fragile artifacts that have managed to survive the erosion of time and wear. Many of Preston's pieces have the web-like delicacy of Victorian hair jewelry or the filigreed complexity of Renaissance-era pins and brooches. The immutability of gold and enamel is offset by the almost quivering thinness of the metal and the small areas of color that seem to come and go with the turn of head and the glance of an eye.

Some of the most successful pieces employ combinations of gold and lead. *Chimera 1*, *Mourning Brooch*, and *Constellation* have a wonderful visual play between the sheen of gold and the low gray luster of the base metal, and the combination also brings to mind the failed projects of ancient alchemists.

A consummate craftsperson, Preston nonetheless allows her wire forms to retain bits of surface irregularities. *Chimera 2* and *Harlequin Brooch* are reminiscent of antique crocheted doilies that refuse to lay completely flat when taken out of storage. Seed pearls and slightly irregular beads of galena appear to be dented and misshapen from wear and time. *Battle Wound 1* and *Battle Wound 2* are blooming flowers and gaping sores, medals to commemorate pain and survival.

For many artists, appropriating elements from nature and history is a cynical act, a nihilistic gesture. For both Sharon Church and Mary Preston, the act is one of celebration and redemption.

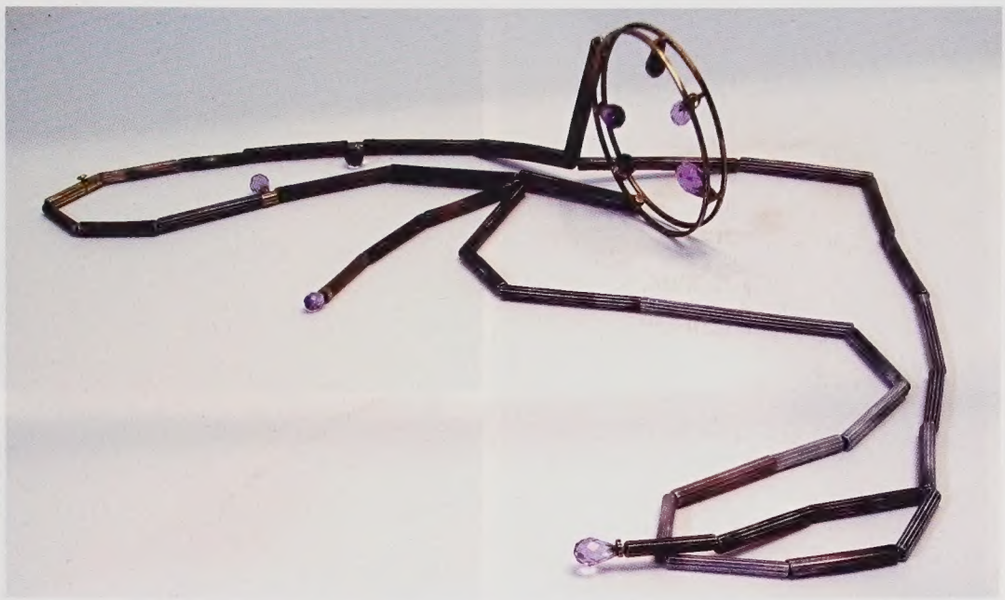
Frank C. Lewis, former editor of *Metalsmith*, is the director of exhibitions and curator of the collections at the Wriston Art Galleries at Lawrence University, Appleton Wisconsin.

clockwise from lower left
Sharon Church
Corsage (brooch), 2003
sterling silver, lemonwood, dye, diamonds
1 3/4 x 2 3/4 x 1"
Photo: Michael Hoover

Sharon Church
Commemorative Brooch for a Bleeding Heart, 2000
Cuban mahogany, diamonds, dye, sterling silver
2 3/4 x 2 3/4 x 3/4"

Mary Preston
Constellation (brooch), 2002
18k green gold, galena, cut steel
2 1/8 x 2 1/8 x 3/4"
Photo: Michael Hoover

Mary Preston
Unknown Lady (choker), 2002
18k gold, silver, mica, seed pearls, fabricated filigree
2 x 2 x 5/8"



"JOHAN VAN ASWEGEN"

SIENNA GALLERY, LENOX, MASSACHUSETTS
JULY 10-AUGUST 6, 2003

by MARJORIE SIMON

Johan van Aswegen could be the symbol of the New Internationalism in jewelry. Born in Namibia, South Africa, later educated in both Pforzheim (Rudiger Lorenzen) and Munich (Hermann Jünger), van Aswegen now resides in the United States and teaches at Rhode Island School of Design. His new work at Sienna Gallery shows what happens when these worlds collide.

Van Aswegen refers to himself as a global chameleon, taking on cultural coloring as he changes continents. It may be no accident that he has long used enamel, which changes the skin of a metal form. Raised in a "feudal agricultural society," van Aswegen considers he had the "luxury to observe nature rather than depend on it." Life on a large cattle farm was very solitary, with a dusty landscape stretching to the horizon under luminous skies unimpeded by tall buildings.

It is tempting to infer political significance from van Aswegen's material choices. The main resources of Namibia are diamonds and minerals. The country borders on the Kalahari desert and the Atlantic Ocean, and the artist's origins are most evident in the earliest pieces, which incorporate sand into enamel, giving the desert and the sea permanence and then capturing it as a jewel in a goldsmith's setting. A group of such brooches forms an archipelago when arranged together, but they lose nothing by being worn independently.

There is an implicit political subtext any time diamonds are used, with special resonance in South Africa because of the dominance of the DeBeers family. Diamonds are never a neutral material, as they are inescapably linked to adornment, social class, and gender. Van Aswegen may or may not make conscious reference to this history, for his explicit subject matter is his own life. That he grew up as part of a racial minority and was educated in two countries with tangled racial histories lends a certain gravity to portraying his own losses, grief, and renewal.

Van Aswegen has a firm footing in traditional enameling techniques of champlevé and cloisonné, as shown in the rather conventional, though beautifully executed, work included in *Munchner Goldschmiede* (1993). A decade later, he emerged from the influence of the Munich group. As shown in the Exhibition in Print 2003, he exemplifies the "new generation" of jewelers who are using enamel in fresh and sometimes startling ways. A dark and heavy cast ring with skulls is leavened by delicate neckpieces and earrings, which have the fragile look of a snapped-off segment of hollow reed. The earrings seem like fragments of a dream that recede upon awakening. Coupled with flawless and sensitive clasps and other means of attachment, the color serves to support the form, and not the other way round. Blues and greens, which fire well on silver, are paired with garnets, iolite, and other semi-precious stones cut as beads or teardrops, colorful globes contrasting nicely with the linear tubing. The sandwashed, sunbleached colors recall the raw sand and shells of the earlier work, but their refined line suggests they are more about jewelry. A few hefty cigar band rings in gold, palladium white gold, and colored diamonds break no new ground, but like the necklaces, are satisfying to wear and just feel good on the hand.

Leaving behind overt references to the desert, van Aswegen's narratives turn to personal events. The ring bearing a cluster of large black skulls could be the keening of South Africa, like the stark silhouettes of William Kentridge's animated charcoal drawings. It isn't necessary to know the skulls concern van Aswegen's mother's death and his eventual emergence from mourning. The budding jewels of new growth on green or gold stalks bring the artist and audience into the light.

As often happens, the newest work appears more refined, as if extraneous matter were jettisoned, leaving behind the essential poetry. Segments of pleated tubing cloaked in a thin wash of enamel are assembled into necklaces and earrings. Accented by the semi-precious stones, they appear to glow from within as they drape sinuously around the neck or slither over the shoulders. Looking deceptively simple in the display case, a few are so artfully constructed that their impact isn't revealed until worn. More than one begged to be reflected directly on skin, defining cleavage above a strapless dress.

The pale simplicity of Sienna Gallery and the spare, contemplative installation is well suited to these understated works. Like many of his German classmates, van Aswegen's work reflects a confident, highly developed aesthetic and impeccable craftsmanship. In his few years in the United States he has continued to develop his own voice and give us plenty to think about.

Marjorie Simon is a metalsmith and writer based in New Jersey.

clockwise from lower left
Neckpiece, 2003
enamel, yellow gold, silver, citrine briolettes
length 21 5/8"
Photo: Kevin Sprague

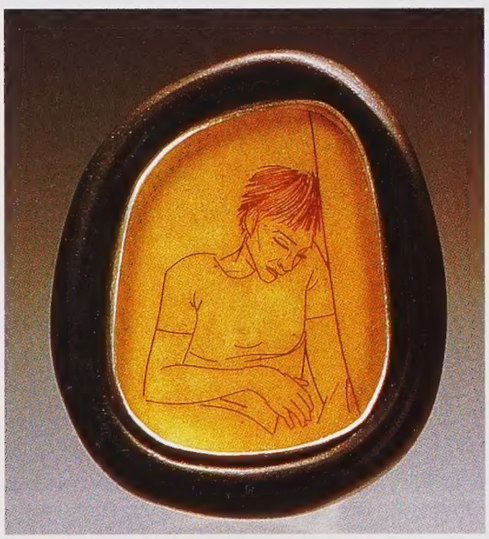
Neckpiece, 2003
enamel, silver, white gold, smoky quartz briolettes
length 15 3/4"
Photo: Kevin Sprague

Neckpiece, 2003
enamel, silver, white gold, amethyst and tourmaline briolettes
length 27 1/2"
Photo: Kevin Sprague

"EVOCATIVE OBJECTS: STUDIO METALSMITHING AND JEWELRY"

BANNISTER GALLERY, RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE, PROVIDENCE
OCTOBER 30–NOVEMBER 26, 2003

by KATHERINE INGRAHAM



Curator Sondra Sherman has put together one of the most conceptually ambitious shows I have seen in the field of metalsmithing, and the result is satisfying, the effects of viewing the work lingering. The beauty of this highly subjective parameter, "evocative," is that the wide range of human emotions waiting to be triggered can lead to an unusually diverse set of objects. In selecting the works, Sherman focused on the potency of an object as a direct result of the artist's studio craft practice (the actual making) and their individual response to the format, jewelry or tableware, with all its personal and social relevance. In doing so, Sherman addresses what should be a more fundamental concern for contemporary metalsmithing: the making of objects that embody, as described in the catalogue essay, "an expressive voice distinct from other art forms."

Twenty-one artists are represented here, the majority in jewelry. Although fewer in number, the tableware commands attention and the show feels more balanced than the numbers would suggest. Abstraction is the norm, with a few pieces incorporating more narrative elements. Particularly exciting is the number of emerging artists included.

Initially, Melanie Bilenker's brooches seem to inhabit the unassuming and quiet world of the memento, a cameo of sorts. Thick circles of ebony focus the eye on the drawings, rendered

almost impossibly in hair. The quality of this drawing is unique, cartoon-like and dynamic. The woman slumped against a wall in *Likeness* is an odd but specific choice that triggers the memory of fatigue. *Nest* by Barbara Seidenath is another quiet piece that captivates the imagination upon further inspection. The illusionary depth created by her enameling technique illustrates the potential emotional impact of the unique maker's mark.

Once picked up, Kristine Bolhuis's *Mesh System Bracelet–Hexagonal*, is impossible to put down. Her flexible structures have transformative qualities that are activated by physical interaction. Once on the wrist, the smallest movements produce mesmerizing effects that evoke childhood play and suggest the infinite. Interaction with the body is also relevant to Maria Phillips's *Suspend*, a necklace of massive proportions comprising a cluster of enameled cup forms suspended on stainless cables. Movement initiates the cups clanging and the weight and point of impact alters the way in which its wearer moves through the world.

Yuyen Chang's "Orifice Series" brooches teeter enticingly between evocative and provocative and the artist acknowledges that discomfort and uncertainty may accompany attempts to interact with the wearer. Playing in the grass was the inspiration for Natalya Pinchuk's series of enameled rings—their direct format (the grass is the ring) removes interference and allows immediate access to memory.

Rebecca Scheer's "Futensils" are variously evocative. In both the *Dinner Knife and Fork*, you can physically feel the impotence of trying to use them to eat. Others in the series, based on the spoon, seem to be having a different, albeit interesting conversation about the social constructs of using fine silverware. Lisa Gralnick's *The Gold Standard #1* offers a visually compelling take on relative value, a consistent theme since artists began addressing the social ramifications of using costly materials to adorn.

Myra Mimlitsch-Gray's work is show-stopping in scale and execution, and subverts the widely understood nature of domestic objects through extreme craft and transformation. *Conflation-Deflating* conjures the effects of a withering remark reverberating across an elegantly set dinner table. Anika Smulovitz's *Lip Liners* in sterling function as objects of adornment and components in a larger installation, not all of which was on display here. By drawing attention to the line where a person's lips meet, Smulovitz presents irrefutable evidence of human individuality. These gain considerable strength in numbers, particularly in their presentation as a series of tightly cropped photo portraits, part Chuck Close, part Andy Goldsworthy.

Overall, many strains of thought emerged in response to the various artist's work. I became perplexed, nostalgic, fascinated, irritated, lulled and awed in turn. I hope this is a common experience and that the show serves to re/energize all who see it.

Katherine Ingraham is a writer and metalsmith living in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts.

An exhibition catalogue is available from the gallery.

clockwise from lower left
Melanie Bilenker
Likeness, 2003
sterling, ebony, ivory piano key, epoxy, hair, crystal, stainless
1 3/8 x 1 1/8 x 3/8"

Natalya Pinchuk
Grass Rings, 2003
copper, enamel
5 1/4 x 3 x 1"

Myra Mimlitsch-Gray
Conflation–Deflating, 2002
copper
3 x 9 x 6"

Kristine Bolhuis
Mesh System Bracelet-Hexagonal, 2003
brass, sterling silver
4 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/2"

"NEW WORKS IN METAL"

WILLIAM TRAVER GALLERY, SEATTLE
JULY 5-AUGUST 3, 2003

by MATTHEW KANGAS

Steel, bronze, and sterling silver were predominant materials used in a variety of ways in "New Works in Metal." German-born Ulrich Pakker was the most traditional (and least original) with fabricated steel- and bronze-sheet abstract sculptures in a safe, modernist vein. Kevin Quinn's flat, painted steel panels also invoke late modernism. Catherine Grisez varies the vessel format with intricate insertions and intrusions of sterling silver wire onto copper. Kristin Tollefson weaves thin steel and silver wires into a variety of different forms, some bowls, some spheres, some wall-mounted. And Jennifer Howard Kicinski is the jeweler of the group, presenting multi-part necklaces that can be worn or displayed in a number of ways. Significantly, none of the five is a teacher; all are full-time working artists.

Pakker's foray into pedestal sculpture is of interest. Cut metal sheets are assembled into circular geometric configurations. A sense of motion is present, like leaves curling in the wind, but solidified in metal. In *Ringer IV*, circles overlap one another. *Ringer III* has a more complex form with several interconnecting sections. Two other works, *Quatro Saboritos I* and *II* have beautifully patinated areas of blue and green, but the little "feet" they have acquired to assure their upright stature seem fussy or, at the very least, unsuccessful formal solutions to gravity and stability. This was Pakker's Seattle gallery debut.

At the other extreme, away from Pakker's aggressive, macho constructions, Kicinski's "Heart Series" presented phenomenally intricate, if awkwardly wearable, necklaces. Part of a broader trend in American metals to straddle jewelry and sculpture, the five necklaces typify the strengths and pitfalls of such an approach.

Inner and outer, open and closed, every imaginable dichotomy is treated in Kicinski's project, with varying degrees of success. Trained at the Universities of Texas and Oregon in jewelry and metalsmithing, her technique is showy and flawless, and her sculptural ambitions unending. Maybe a primary problem is the central valentine heart. Curved and elegant, it barely supports all the amazing handiwork each contains. *Number 2* has red glass beads inside a silver case that suggests an English tea ball strainer. *Number 4* and *5* expose the interior through silver lacework. *Number 1* also operates open and shut, but with slightly greater delicacy. The outer silver leaves are irregular in size. Open, like a locket, a carved acrylic "jewel" is disappointing. Wouldn't a small garnet have better underscored the symbolism of true love and attraction?

Grisez's hammering of the copper interior of *Nesting: Root-bound* into cloth-like folds is a tour-de-force. The starry silver elements set on the copper continue the organic illusionism of her earlier "Black Box" series. *Escapement* is a more conventional bowl; its square enamel insert at its inner center surrounded by pink copper seems very California Arts and Crafts, ca. 1900. *Epiphany* is spikier, with small metal rods filling the entire bowl cavity. *Defortification* is a lame effort at political subject matter. Tiny silver pistols point upward and out of the bowl.

It's difficult painting on metal and being taken seriously as a painter. The firm support and applied color suggest a hybrid realm, somewhere between fine art and architectural décor. Quinn is exploring linear compositions with no more than five or six welded lines per painting so that the areas in between the lines take on great importance. Lacking the tactility of brushwork, or the smooth surfaces of canvas, they let the steel show through. From the plainest (and best), *Oxidized Three-Line Composition* to the fussiest and most colorful, *Yellow Four-Part Composition*, the eye is drawn to surface activity rather than central image. The lines have a strongly welded or torched look in *Three-Line Composition*. This hits the right note of accentuating a fire-based medium without the unfair comparison to conventional painting. Elsewhere, even for lovers of abstract art, there is simply not enough tension between line and space or the composition and the rectangular format.

Tollefson is the undisputed sculptor in the group and manages to be so while exploding expectations of volume and mass. In their place, she offers transparent linear shells made of steel wires. Despite her naturalistic titles, the works have a brittle look that does not require such allusions. *Bulb Ring* weaves together steel circles that are offset by extended hairy additions of more metal wire. *Pistil Ring* and *Standing Pips* don't really seem different enough from one another. Each has a ring of metal-wire balls beneath a linked, upward network of more wires.

The star of the show, *Bright Mound*, attains mass by grouping hundreds of four-sided "spheres" in a flat-bottomed bouquet of sorts. With tiny plastic pearls, *Bright Mound* handles the pedestal well, has jewelry-like qualities, but avoids the strained preciousness of Kicinski. Not jewelry trying to be sculpture, *Bright Mound* is a sculpture that has strange, jewelry associations. That makes all the difference.

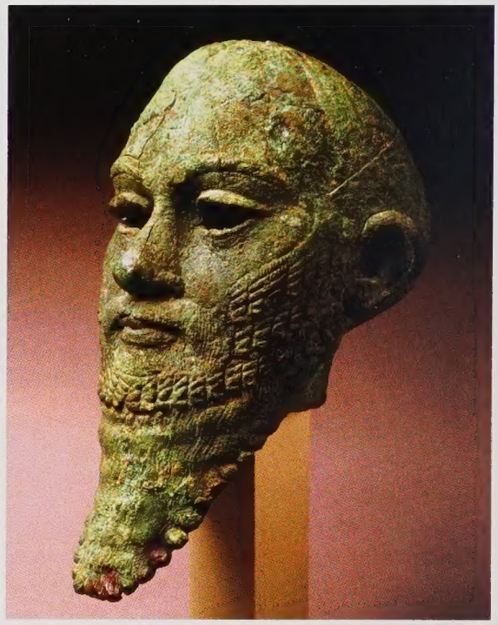
Matthew Kangas, an art critic living in Seattle, is a corresponding editor for *Art in America* and a contributing editor for *Sculpture* and *Glass Quarterly*.

clockwise from top left
Kristin Tollefson
Bright Mound, 2000
steel wire and plastic pearls
9 x 16"

Catherine Grisez
Nesting: Root-bound, 2003
copper, sterling silver
2 3/4 x 9 1/4 x 9 1/4"
Photo: Doug Yaple

Jennifer Howard Kicinski
Heart Series #3, 2003
silver, carved acrylic, nickel
12 x 5"
Photo: Roger Schreiber

Kevin Quinn
Red Three Line Composition, 2003
paint on steel
60 1/4 x 42 1/2"
Photo: Stephen Gulassa



"THE ART OF THE FIRST CITIES: THE THIRD MILLENNIUM B.C. FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN TO THE INDUS"

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK
MAY 8-AUGUST 17, 2003

by LANIE LEE

"The Art of the First Cities" is an extensive survey of art from the ancient Near East. Most of the focus is on Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigres and Euphrates rivers (Iraq, eastern Syria, and southeastern Turkey), where the first cities arose in the fourth millennium B.C. Magnificent temples, palaces, and tombs were erected during that time to honor gods and kings. Large-scale sculpture, relief carvings, jewelry, and other works of art decorated these elaborate monuments. The trading of goods between cities flourished, and the area from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indus Valley developed into a major cultural network. The exhibition is an extraordinary look into this ancient culture, which served as the model for other civilizations that followed.

During the installation of the exhibition, the invasion of Iraq was underway. A museum news release states, "The Metropolitan Museum of Art acknowledges this potentially devastating assault on world culture with the most profound sense of loss and is committed to working with colleagues around the world in the efforts at recovery and restoration."

Metalworkers of the Near East created remarkable works of art that became the prototype for future art traditions. *Kneeling Bull Holding a Vessel* is an impressive sculpture made from many pieces of hammered silver. The bull seems humanlike—wearing a patterned cloth and extending a vessel outward as if making an offering. The simple geometric design of the cloth flows naturally along the rounded forms of the bull's body. Historians believe the bull might have been used as a noisemaker because several pebbles are encased within the sculpture. In Mesopotamian art it is common to see animals with human features or characteristics, and vice versa.

One of the most famous objects of the Royal Cemetery in Ur is the *Rearing Goat with a Flowering Plant*. Originally this small sculpture was not freestanding (the goat's hoofs did not touch the base), it was a part of the base of an object that did not survive. The metal elements of this piece (gold, silver, and copper) eloquently contrast with the white shell and lapis lazuli. Gold was modeled over wood for the goat's face and the stalk of the plant, the underside of the goat is composed of silver, and the goat's ears are composed of copper. For the Sumerians, the goat and floral branching symbolized plant fecundity and animal fertility.

Perhaps the most extraordinary technological development during this time was lost-wax casting. The process allowed for the production of the earliest hollow-cast large-scale sculptures in the ancient world, such as *Head of a Ruler* (the alloy is made up of more than 98 percent copper with no tin or lead to facilitate in the casting process). Even though the features of the face were modeled in simple details, it conveys the graceful poise of a ruler (shells or stones were probably once set for the eyes). An intricate pattern of abstract lines for the hair and beard add to the regal bearing of the subject.

The *Diadem with an Elaborate Open-Worked Pattern* is a fine example of elegance in simplicity. The diadem-crown is formed from an open-worked design of rows of Xs. It was found on the head of a skeleton, most likely an elite or a member of royalty.

This exhibition gives only a glimpse into a vital culture that thrived centuries ago in the ancient Near East. It was realized with the cooperation of some 50 museums from dozens of countries in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Politicians would perhaps benefit from the cooperation and knowledge of other cultures involved in the creation of this remarkable exhibition.

Lanie Lee is an artist and writer living in New York City.

An exhibition catalogue is available from the museum.

clockwise from lower left
Rearing Goat with a Flowering Plant
Ur, Mesopotamia, ca. 2550–2400 B.C.
gold, silver, lapis lazuli, copper alloy, shell, red limestone, and bitumen
height 16 3/4"
The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia

Diadem with an Elaborate Open-Worked Pattern
Alaca Höyük, Anatolia, late 3rd millennium B.C.
gold
2 1/8 x 7 1/2 x 7 1/2"
Ankara Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Turkey
Photo: Bruce White

Kneeling Bull Holding a Vessel
Iran, ca. 3000-2800 B.C.
silver
6 3/8 x 2 1/2 x 4 1/4"
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Head of a Ruler
Iran (?), late 3rd millennium B.C.
copper alloy
13 1/2 x 8 3/8 x 8 3/8"
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Photos courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

"THE KNOCK-OFF SHOW"

THOMAS MANN GALLERY I/O,
NEW ORLEANS
OCTOBER 4–NOVEMBER 15, 2003

by LAKE DOUGLAS

If, as is often said, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, the "The Knock-Off Show" at Thomas Mann's Gallery I/O in New Orleans is a veritable self-induced love-in. To celebrate his 30 years as an artist and 15 years of his Gallery I/O, Mann invited about 100 of his colleagues, friends, and associates to submit work that imitated the distinctive and influential Techno-Romantic style he developed early in his career. Just over 30 artists accepted the challenge, and the resulting show is an interesting essay on imitation, inspiration, and flattery.

The show, beautifully displayed in Mann's jewel-box of a gallery, is three small inter-related shows in one: there are 38 objects inspired by Mann's Techno-Romantic motifs (hearts, hands, animals), a case of the participating artists' own works, and retrospective displays, by decade, of Mann's 30 years of influential object-making.

The 'knock-offs' range from Mann clones (objects by Marylin Massa, Peggy Cochran, and C. Ramagoz, for instance) to subtle interpretations by those influenced more by Mann's spirit than his substance: Deb Stoner's glasses seem inspired by Mann's sly sense of humor, and objects by Yuko Yagisawa and Jane Adam, less obvious variations on Mann's style, take his often brusque, Techno-Romanticism on an arc of refinement. In size, objects range from small ornaments to the rather large and colorful necklace by Barbara Minor, one of the show's most successful examples of walking the tightrope between imitation and personal expression. In the exhibit, the relationship of Minor's necklace to Mann's work is obvious; separated from the exhibit, one might not easily see that connection.

Adjacent to the "knock-offs" is a cabinet displaying the works of participating artists, offering them the opportunity to showcase their individual artistic visions. Mann's own retrospective exhibit, mounted on displays that can be easily disassembled and transported, rest atop cabinets with drawers that pull out and show representative work from his three decades in business. This exhibition concept was developed in response to requests from craft curators and has been seen in various locations throughout the country. Wall cases show his current work, allowing the visitor to see how Mann has evolved from Techo-Romantic to where he is today.

We live in a period, unimaginable even a decade ago, when technology makes just about anything possible. At this time of instant access (and increased demands for instant gratification), many writers and artists, both performing and visual, are raising concerns about unauthorized duplication, and having a show that *invites* artistic imitation is an interesting and provocative idea. Obviously, regardless of its content, this show raises conceptual questions about inspiration and the creative process, and some will say (for better or worse) there is self-promotion involved here. But the reality is this: all creative people are inspired by the works of other creative people, regardless of media. Mann, for instance, acknowledges influences from diverse sources, including the works of Joseph Cornell, Louise Nevelson, Buckminster Fuller, Albert Paley, and others. For some artists the inspiration is literal, direct, and obvious; for others it is conceptual, subtle, and not immediately apparent. Both are represented here, with varying shades of difference in between.

That Mann originated this show as part of a professional milestone says that he is less concerned about being "knocked off" than he is about showing, with some degree of ownership and, perhaps, amusement, how his influence has grown throughout his world. And, by the way, he shows how he's moved on to something else. The popularity of his work and its widespread artistic influence thus far are tributes both to his talents as a craftsman/designer and to his astute sense of what it takes to operate and maintain a successful business.

We all remember, from those art history slide lectures of the past, attributions "from the school of" that collectively assemble unknown artists into categories based on apparent inspiration. Very few artists, in their lifetimes, get to the point where their work becomes influential enough to have created a "school" of artistic influence. Arguably Thomas Mann is a contemporary exception; this exhibit, though abbreviated and certainly not comprehensive, establishes that he has, in fact, created a recognizable "school" of design that will likely remain influential for a long time to come.

Lake Douglas is a freelance writer, garden historian, and former public art administrator in New Orleans.

clockwise from left
Barbara Minor
Tribute to TMD, 2003
enamel, copper, plastic coated metal, silver, copper
9 x 11"

Peggy Cochran
Hand Knock-off Pin, 2003
bronze, silver
2 x 2 5/8"

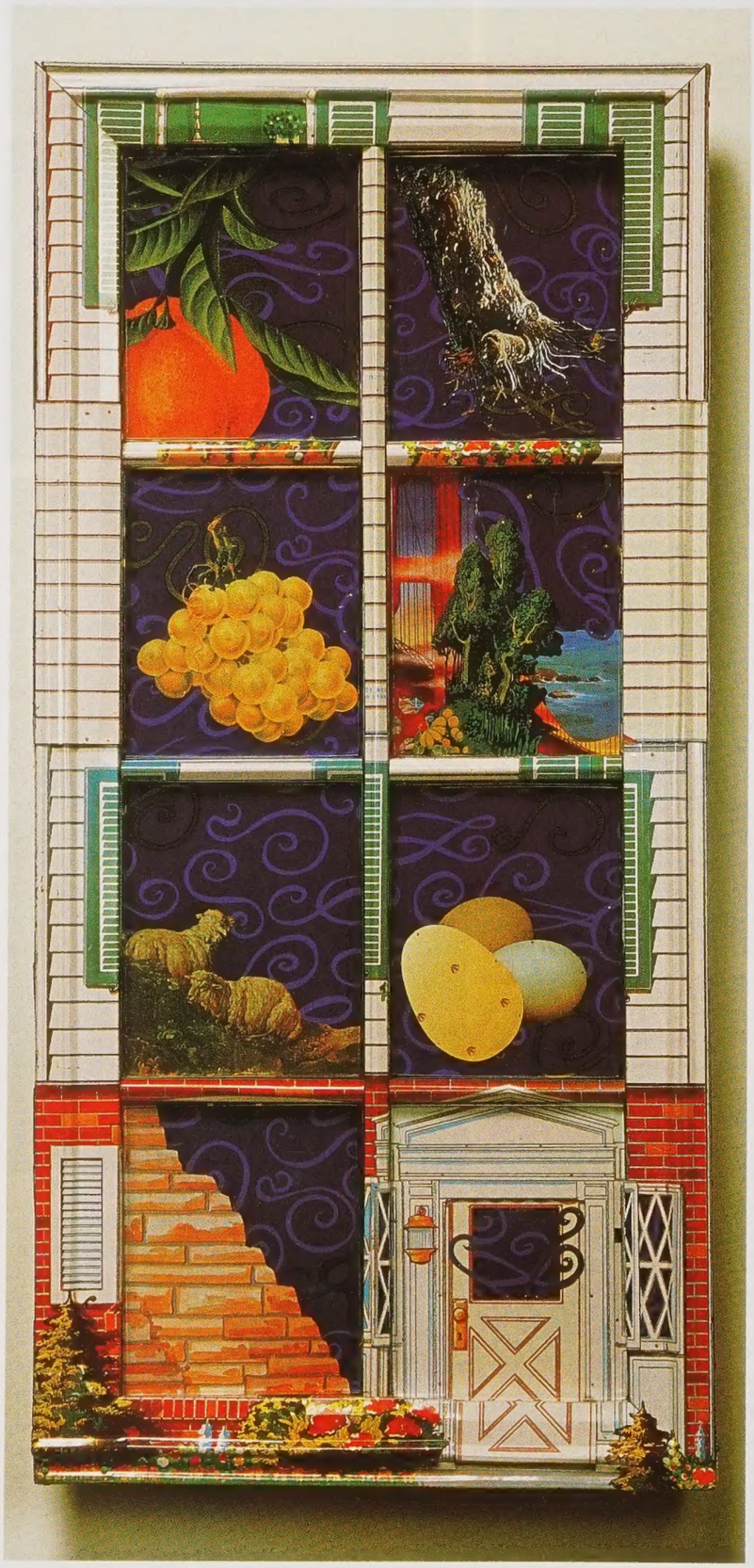
Yuko Yagisawa
Memos, 2003
sterling silver, Japanese paper, threads
2 1/8 x 3"

Deb Stoner
Glasses, 2003
stainless steel, sterling silver, bone
5 1/4 x 1 1/2"

Photos: Rebecca Cole

COMMISSIONS

by Elizabeth Broadrup Lieberman



Harriete Estel Berman
Place Before Us These Symbols of Pesach, 2003

Harriete Estel Berman's unconventional seder plate serves as a symbolic window into the Jewish celebration of Passover (*Pesach* in Hebrew), a holiday commemorating the ancient Jews' escape from enslavement in Egypt. Jews observe Passover every spring, gathering together for evening seder services that retell the story of liberation through prayer, song, food, and wine. Central to each Passover dining table is a ceremonial seder plate, inscribed with Hebrew text, that holds symbolic foods. Berman designed her seder plate to resemble a domestic window, inviting viewers to partake visually of the seder ritual, which is celebrated in the home. She constructed the window's frame from vintage pre-printed steel dollhouses and cut richly colored images from tin containers to create scenes within the eight panes. These scenes depict a door open to the spirit of Elijah as well as *Pesach* foods, both traditional (parsley dipped in salt water, eggs, horseradish root, lamb shank bone, charoset, and wine) and contemporary (the orange, a feminist addition meant to honor women's participation in Judaism). The Jüdisches (Jewish) Museum Berlin in Germany, which commissioned the work, requested clear visual symbols to ensure understanding by non-Jewish viewers. The project was delayed six weeks while Berman searched for an appropriate image of sheep to represent the shank bone (the approved image came from a 1930s Sunshine Biscuit tin that reproduced an eighteenth-century François Boucher painting!). Berman cut the window scenes and their night-blue backgrounds from recycled tin containers using a jeweler's saw, then connected the layers with screws and rivets and covered them with Plexiglas. She left the tin surfaces intact, preserving scratches and blemishes as a kind of "patina." Berman received the commission on a recommendation from staff at The Jewish Museum in New York, which owns a similar seder plate she made earlier. She completed *Place Before Us These Symbols of Pesach* in four months and delivered it to Jüdisches Museum Berlin on the first day of Passover in April 2003.

Harriete Estel Berman
Place Before Us These Symbols of Pesach, 2003
From the series, "An Orange Belongs on a Seder Plate"
recycled tin containers; steel doll houses; Plexiglas;10k gold, sterling silver, and aluminum rivets; stainless steel and brass screws
23 1/4 x 11 x 2 1/2"
Commissioned by Jüdisches Museum Berlin, Germany
Photo: Philip Cohen
For further information visit: www.harriete-estel-berman.info

Tony Berlant
What You See is Who You Are, 2002

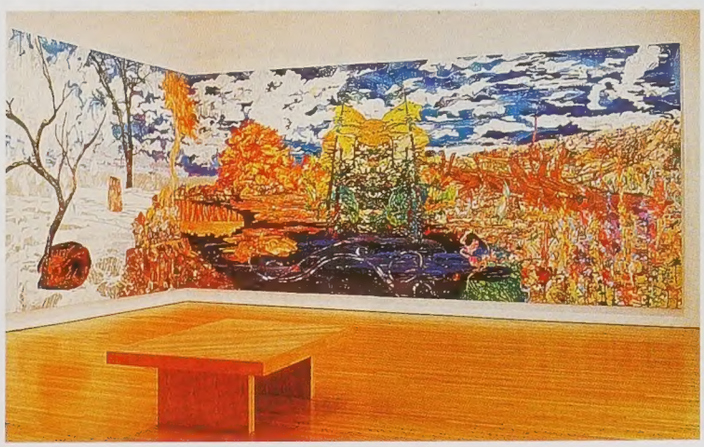
The panoramic metal collage *What You See is Who You Are* pulses with color, movement, and the rhythmic evolution of the seasons. Tony Berlant created the monumental landscape for Target Corporation's headquarters in Minneapolis. (Target has an established program of commissioning art for its corporate offices.) Target chairman and CEO Robert J. Ulrich offered Berlant the commission after consulting with Dr. Evan Mauer, director of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Berlant accepted the offer as an opportunity to realize his vision of a "long, highly subjective landscape" inspired by the densely detailed fantasy paintings of Hieronymus Bosch as well as traditional Chinese landscapes painted on scrolls. *What You See is Who You Are* translates Berlant's personal experience of the forest into an "internal dreamscape," using Minnesota's wooded landscape as reference. Viewers glimpse the 55-foot-long collage as they ride escalators to the second floor of a huge glass atrium; the landscape unfolds as they walk past, discovering countless minute details the longer they look. These vividly colored details emerge from thousands of thin steel fragments as small as one half inch by one half inch. Berlant uses preprinted found metal (including misprints from commercial lithography sources) as well as new metal that he fabricates and paints. After cutting small pieces with tin shears, he nails them to a plywood substrata with steel brads, either by hand or with a pneumatic nail gun. These brads create a surface texture with "the energy of brushstrokes in a painting or pencil marks in a drawing," according to the artist. Though Berlant had worked on projects of similar scale in the past, he had never attempted a work of such intricate detail. He completed the massive collage with the help of a few assistants in 10 months. *What You See is Who You Are* was exhibited at Lennon, Weinberg, Inc. gallery in New York before its permanent installation at Target Corporation's headquarters in May 2003.

Tony Berlant
What You See is Who You Are, 2002
metal collage on wood
9 1/2 x 55'

Commissioned by Target Corporation, Minneapolis, Minnesota
For further information contact: Tony@berlant.net

Elizabeth Broadrup Lieberman is a freelance writer living in Michigan.

For more information and guidelines about submitting commissions to *Metalsmith* visit www.snagmetalsmith.org



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www.snagmetalsmith.org

by Dana Singer

SNAG Enamel Exhibition at SOFA Chicago

SNAG presented an exhibition of the work featured in the 2003 Exhibition in Print, "Contemporary Enamel," curated by well-known enamellists Gretchen Goss and Maria Phillips. Board member James Cohen and SNAG member Deb Karash created a sublime exhibit that attracted thousands of show attendees. Phillips and Goss also gave a slide presentation, "Enameling: A Current Perspective," sponsored by SNAG, as part of SOFA's popular two-day lecture series. Their essay of the same title, first published in the Exhibition in Print, was featured in the SOFA Chicago catalogue.

The SNAG Collection at SOFA Chicago

For the second consecutive year, SNAG held a successful silent auction of the SNAG Collection at SOFA Chicago, in conjunction with its annual resource table. The 2003 theme of the auction was "Body Geometrics: Earrings," featuring nine sets of one-of-a-kind earrings. Contributing artists were Petra Class, Barbara Cohen, Cynthia Eid, Noam Elyashiv, Anne Forbes, Karen Gilbert, Janis Kerman, Marjorie Simon, and Rachelle Thiewes, all represented by galleries exhibiting at SOFA.

SNAG members Sandie Zilker and Edward McCartney again coordinated the auction and designed the elegant display booth. Last year's theme was "Body Geometrics: Brooches."

Metalsmith Goes All Four-color

Achieving a dream that has been 23 years in the making, the SNAG board of directors voted unanimously to move *Metalsmith* to an all four-color publication. The predecessor to *Metalsmith* was published under the name *Goldsmiths Journal*. In 1980, *Metalsmith* was born, with a new name, format, and more professional presentation, which has continued to evolve over the years. Under the strong stewardship of editor Suzanne Ramljak, designers ted studios, and executive director Dana Singer, *Metalsmith* will continue to lead the field of jewelry, design, and the metal arts.

New SNAG Poster Features Student Work

Under the guidance of Professor Chris Ramsay and Chair Nick Bormann, in the Art Department at Oklahoma State University, student Ivanete Blanco designed a new promotional poster for SNAG featuring 26 pieces of work made by students from 20 schools in the United States and Canada. These posters were distributed last fall to nearly 200 schools and are available upon request.

Dana Singer is the executive director of the Society of North American Goldsmiths.

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SNAG

top to bottom
SNAG's "Enamel: A Current Perspective" exhibition booth at SOFA Chicago
Photo: Kevin Jankowski

The SNAG Collection at SOFA Chicago, featuring "Body Geometrics: Earrings"

Covers of the February 1980 issue of *Goldsmiths Journal* and Winter 2004 issue of *Metalsmith*

The new SNAG student membership promotional poster

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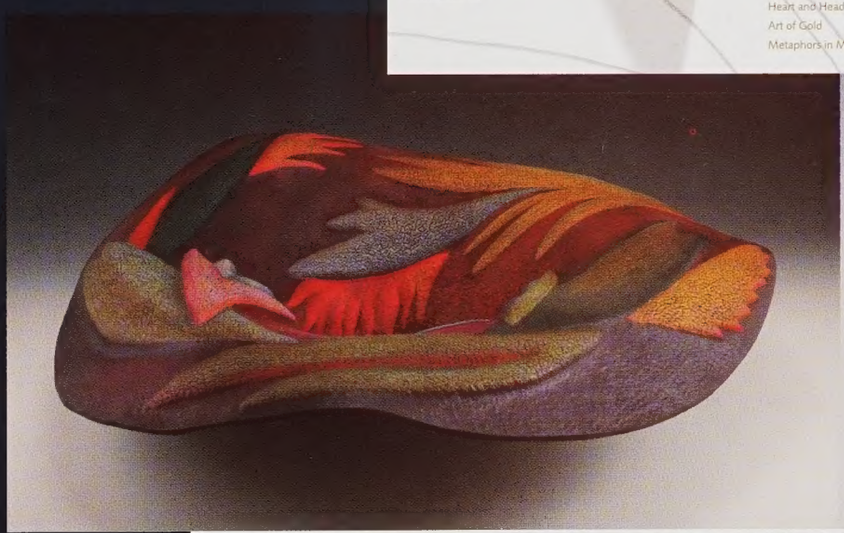

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Myra Mimlitsch-Gray
Cup with Oval, 1998
sterling silver
5 x 4 x 3"
Photo: Robert Storm

Biba Schutz
Ceremonial Pendant, 1998
copper, sterling, fine silver
4 3/4 x 1 1/4 x 1 1/2"
Photo: Ron Boszko

(Summer 2003 *Metalsmith*)
cover: Manfred Bischoff
Brothers (brooch), 2001
Courtesy Joseph Kosuth and
Cornelia Lauf, Rome

Helen Shirk
Sustaining Sprit XXVII, 2000
copper, patina, colored pencils
6 x 23 x 23"

Whitney Boin
Post Engagement Ring, 1996
produced since 1988
platinum, 18k
Photo: Todd Flashner

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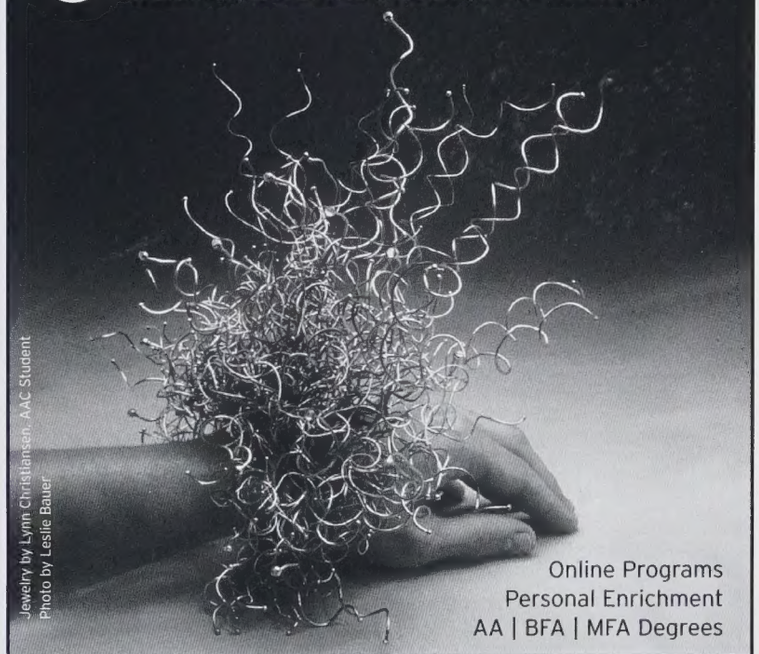
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Photo by Leslie Bauer

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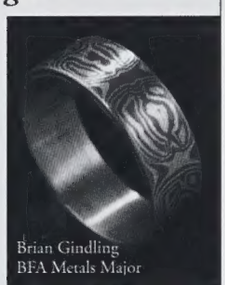
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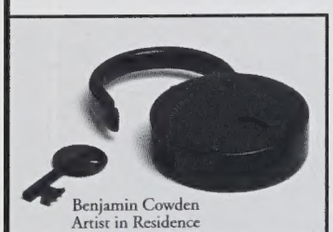
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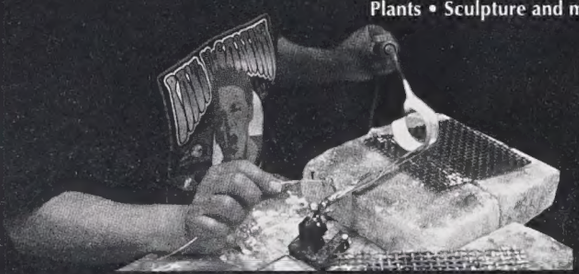

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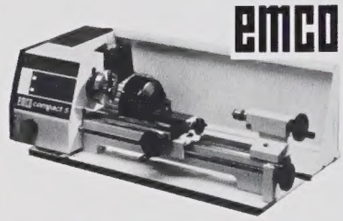

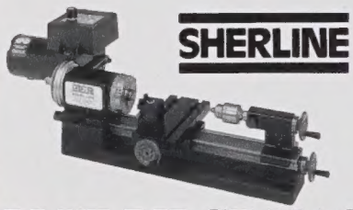

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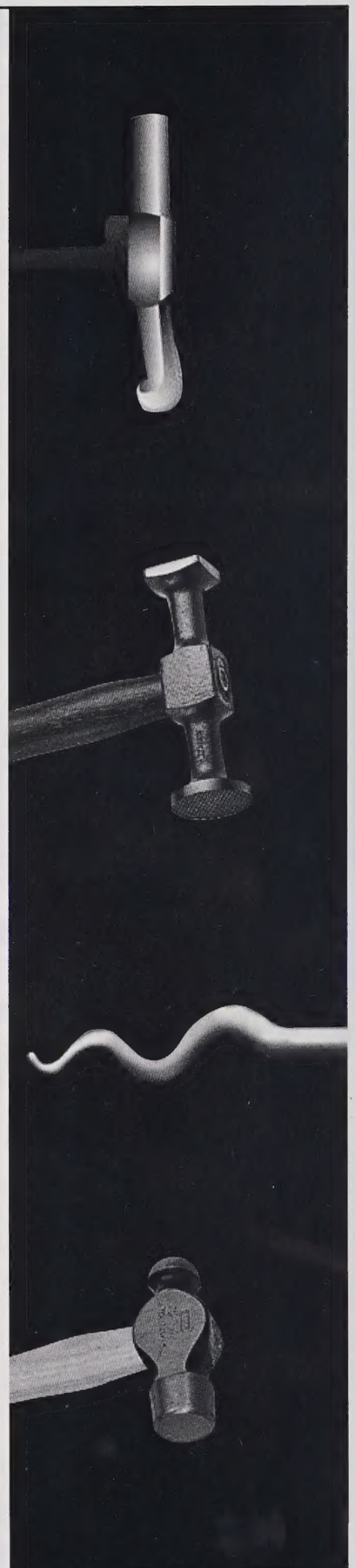

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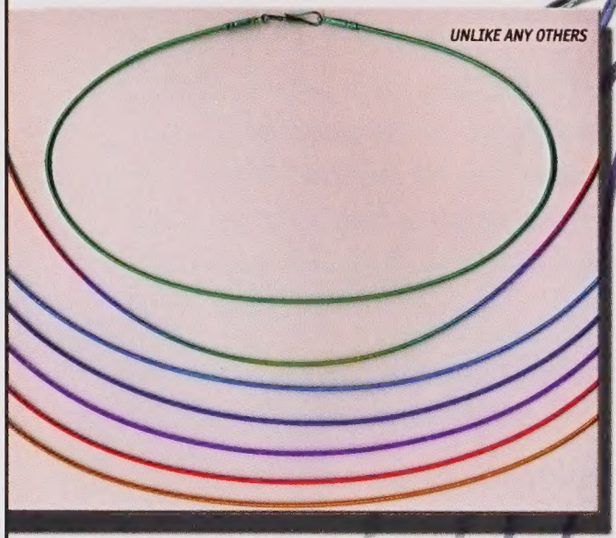

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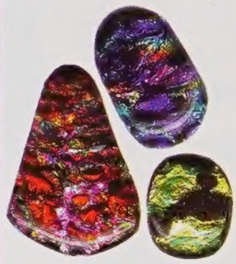

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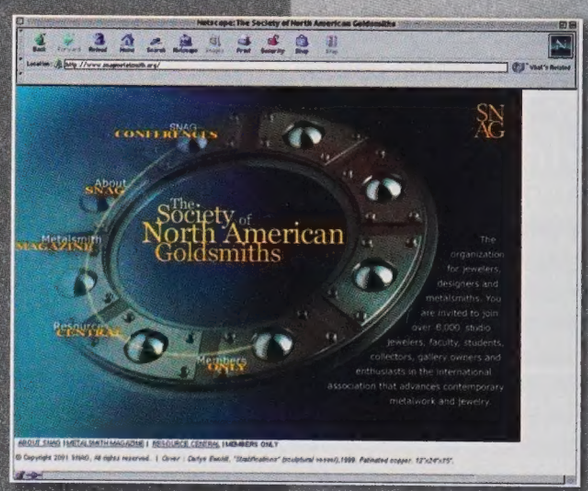

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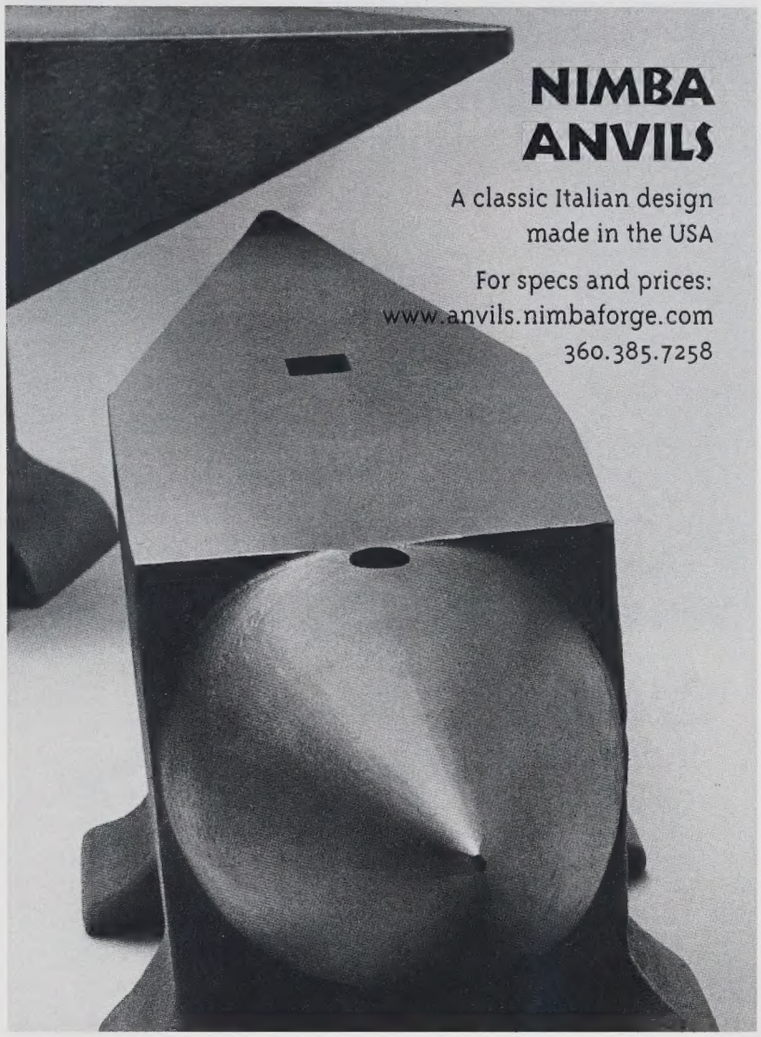

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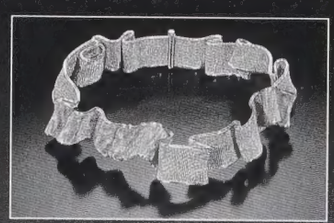

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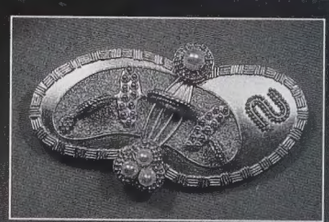

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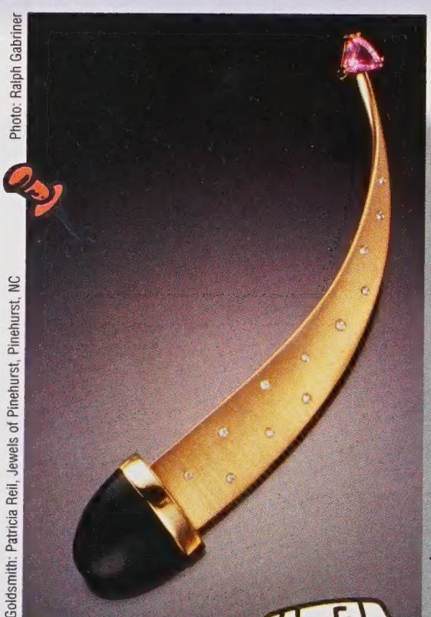

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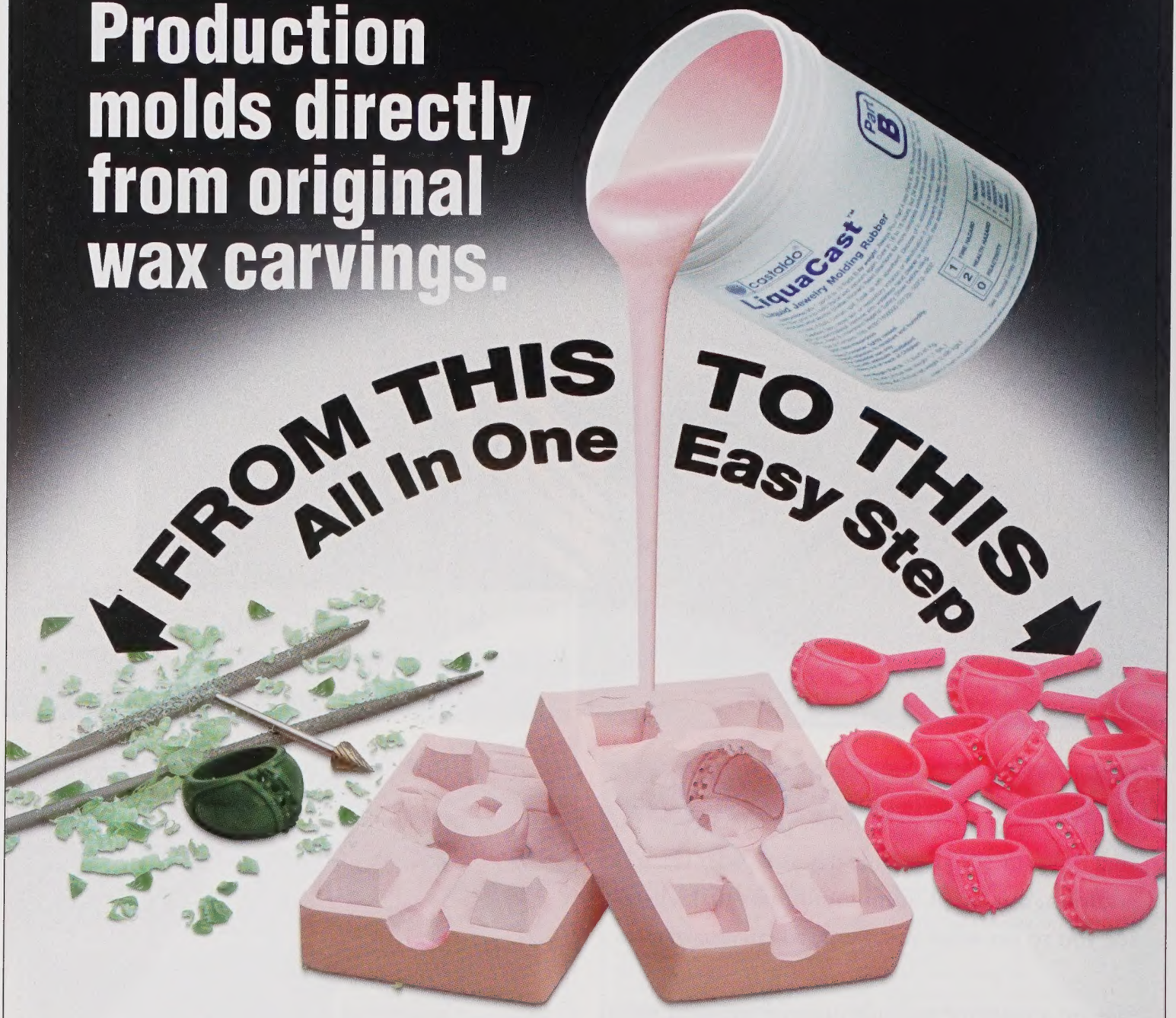

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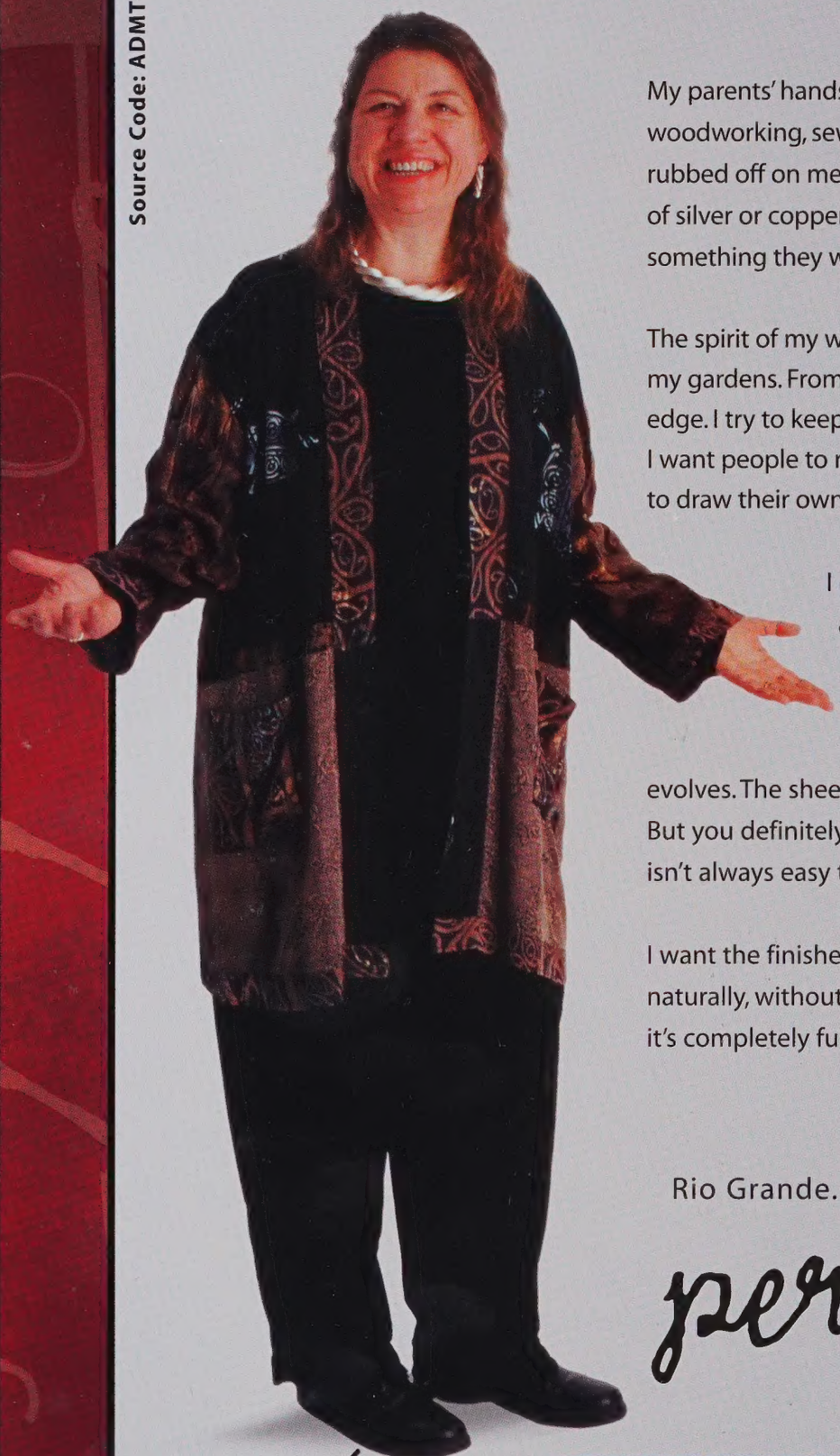

My parents' hands were always busy making things—woodworking, sewing and weaving. I guess that rubbed off on me. It's exciting to turn a flat, plain sheet of silver or copper into an object people find beautiful, something they want to own and cherish.

The spirit of my work is rooted in nature. It comes from my gardens. From walks in the woods. Along the water's edge. I try to keep the look of my pieces ambiguous. I want people to react to them personally, individually, to draw their own conclusions about what they see.

I develop a relationship with my metal, a serendipity. I listen to what it's telling me—though I already think I know where it wants to go—and it says, "No, go here." Slowly, the piece evolves. The sheet takes on a soft and fluid shape. But you definitely have to persuade it—and metal isn't always easy to persuade.

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